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OUR KNOWLEDGE OF  
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# OUR KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST

AN HISTORICAL APPROACH

BY

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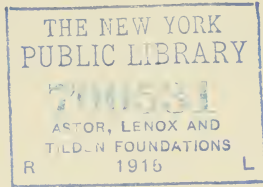
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TO MY WIFE

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## PREFACE

WE hear it often said that these are days of change. Indeed they are. Perhaps there is more of the spirit of change in this generation than in many that have gone before. But we must not forget that change has been a continual element in human affairs. We all accept this in general whether we believe, or do not believe, that change means progress.

But many who recognize this factor in human life at the same time maintain that it does not hold in the realm of religion and religious thought. In their minds, any change of view regarding the inspiration of the Bible destroys reverence for the Bible as the Word of God; any change of view regarding Jesus Christ dethrones him from his

eternal place as the Lord and Master of our lives.

I have too much respect and admiration for the spiritual power and intellectual honesty of thousands of men and women who think in this way to appear for a moment as in any sense their antagonist. I was born and brought up in an atmosphere permeated by such ideas and I owe too much to my upbringing to be able, even if I wished, to deny the spiritual value of that heritage.

But there are many, brought up as I was brought up, and many others not so reared for whom the old has become increasingly unsatisfying. I do not mean those who have failed to keep their religious life warm and tender; for this, unfortunately, may and does happen to men of all shades of thought. I mean men who are sincerely trying to know and to live the truth.

There are several legitimate reasons why such men often feel that the old statements

are unsatisfactory. One is that historical investigation has altered their view of the past. I admit that much which has been put forth under the guise of historical criticism has been insecurely grounded. Still, such a phenomenon is inevitable if the benefits of complete freedom of investigation are to be secured. Conclusions which distort or run beyond the facts destroy themselves, sooner or later; further, the scientific law of "trial and error" is too important to be overlooked. But the admission just made does not alter the plain fact that historical study has forced many good and sincere Christians to alter greatly their views regarding the Bible, including the Gospels and the life of Christ. This readjustment is for many a hard trial and beset with religious danger. Those who are going through it should guard their religious life by every possible means.

I wish to emphasize that I am not particularly interested in pressing a new point of

view upon any who honestly and intelligently hold to the age-old formulæ and derive comfort and power from them. The religious life is the main thing for us all. But many of us have been obliged to readjust our views for the very sake of that Christian faith we long for and need. Many others have turned their backs upon the Church, and even upon all religion, because they have not been helped to a new view which would have shown them that such desertion is unnecessary, harmful and wrong.

It is for such that this little book has been written and my sole and sincere purpose in writing it has been to advance the interests of Christ's Kingdom among men. To those who may think its conclusions negative I can only say that these conclusions form a basis on which I have been able to maintain a vital, positive faith in Christ as Master, Lord and Saviour. This basis has set me free to see and to hold before myself the simplicity of the Gospel. But this simplicity, as I have

elsewhere said, is truly "a terrible simplicity." Intellectual problems may be hard to solve; but the hardest problem of all is to maintain one's Christian spirit in the midst of the hurly-burly of our distracted modern life. The gravity of this problem should constrain all who are in any way akin in their attitude toward Christ to cease strife and join hands in the Great Campaign of winning the world to Christ.

The four chapters of this book appeared originally as articles in *The Biblical World* of Chicago. I wish to thank the editors for permission to reprint them in book-form. A few changes have been made but nothing essential has been altered.

LUCIUS HOPKINS MILLER,  
Princeton, New Jersey,

September 21, 1914.





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**OUR KNOWLEDGE OF  
CHRIST**



## CHAPTER I

### THE SOURCE OF OUR INFORMATION CONCERNING JESUS

#### THE MEAGERNESS OF INFORMATION OUTSIDE THE GOSPELS

IF we were deprived of the four Gospels, our information regarding the life of Jesus would be extremely meager.

Strangely enough, Josephus, the Jewish historian who lived in the latter half of the first century and wrote at length about the Jews, does not mention Jesus; that is, in what is considered his genuine writing. Tacitus, however, speaks of a certain "Christus" who was put to death in the days of Pilate, probably our Jesus.

Paul, the earliest New Testament writer, gives us only scanty references to Jesus'

earthly life. Whether he knew much about the details is an open question. It is hard to believe that he did not and yet hard to see why he refers to them so little if he did. The reason may be found in the fact that the center of his interest was the "Risen Christ." "I know not Christ after the flesh," says Paul. Whether that means that he actually did not know, or that he deliberately put aside such knowledge in favor of a higher and a better knowledge, is hard to say. Paul preached Christ crucified and risen; the death explaining the new relation of Christians to the law and to sin, the resurrection revealing the new life in the Spirit. Thus his testimony is historically valuable, in the present connection, at two points, chiefly, but two very important points—the death of Christ and the resurrection. Concerning the teaching of Jesus, the Pauline epistles contain only four definite quotations and a few other allusions.

The other New Testament epistles have

few historical references, are all later than the Gospels themselves, and so are of little independent value for the life of Jesus. The Apocalypse gives us little or nothing and the Book of Acts is the second volume of a work of which Luke is volume one; hence it usually assumes all the information contained in the latter. The Book of Acts, however, does purport to give us facts concerning Jesus from the time of the resurrection to that of the ascension; it gives a picture of the ideas and spirit of the first Christians and the rise of these ideas, the origin of this spirit, in fact the very existence of these Christians, we must account for; finally, it supplies one priceless saying of Jesus, elsewhere unknown, namely, "It is more blessed to give than to receive"—a quotation found, however, in a speech assigned to Paul.

In spite of these apparently negative results, had we only these writings and no Gospels, we should know that a certain Jesus of Nazareth so lived and taught that he in-

#### 4 SOURCE OF OUR INFORMATION

spired many Jews with a new way of life; that he was done to death by the Jewish leaders because of his teaching and example; that his followers *believed*, at least, that he had risen from the dead, had appeared to them and continued to live in direct communion with them through the Holy Spirit; that these followers finally broke away from Judaism and established the Christian religion.

#### WHY WERE THE GOSPELS WRITTEN SO LATE?

It is no wonder that the question has ever since been raised with insistence: "What sort of personality could give rise to such facts?"

This question our four Gospels profess to answer. We must remember that they were all written forty to seventy years after the death of Jesus and that the authors had to depend for their information upon either



oral or previously written accounts. They wrote after Paul's work was done and after Christianity had secured a good start upon the path of world-conquest. Many problems had arisen which did not emerge during the life of Jesus and many things had acquired an entirely new aspect.

Furthermore, the deeds and the sayings of Jesus, whose report was handed down during these intervening years, were not recalled and recorded by men like our modern historians. Ancient writers did not usually employ a careful and a conscious method for the express purpose of setting forth historic fact in a way that would stand the test of an exacting criticism. Even when they possessed this purpose, as the author of Luke certainly did, both the method used and the criticism to which the results were subjected were very different from what we now understand by the terms "historical method" and "historical criticism." The atmosphere and circumstances of the case were then

## 6 SOURCE OF OUR INFORMATION

quite different and, while we need not be unduly alarmed, we must, as honest and intelligent men and women, make due allowance for these things. Let us try to reconstruct the actual conditions.

Jesus wrote nothing and, for a long time at least, his immediate disciples wrote nothing about the things that most seriously concerned them. This is easily understood.

In the first place, many eyewitnesses were still alive—men and women who had followed Jesus and had companied with him. They had seen more or less the things which he did and had heard his words as they fell from his lips. In many communities, both in Palestine and elsewhere, there were some to whom the others, less favored, could turn with the questions: "What did Jesus say?" "What did Jesus do?" No doubt, in this way, many different reports arose, and also varying interpretations of the same reports. Yet, in this way also, a body of true tradition must have been built up and a funda-

mentally correct impression of Jesus' personality transmitted.

Another fact which undoubtedly delayed the rise of *written* accounts was this. The earliest Christians were all Jews and, for a time, considered themselves good Jews. They revered the Law; they used and honored the sacred Scriptures of their race. Most of the early gentile converts, also, were either proselytes to Judaism or "God-fearing Gentiles," like Cornelius the Centurion, and had attached themselves to Judaism largely because of the strong appeal of the Old Testament to their better selves. The difference between all these people and the orthodox Jew was that, as followers of the Nazarene Prophet, they interpreted the Scriptures in the light of their Christian experience. The early chapters of the Book of Acts, and in fact the whole New Testament, show clearly that the first Christians saw in the Old Testament the prophecy and justification of their views of Jesus. Thus

the Old Testament was christianized, and the Christians had in their hands from the beginning sacred books which supported their faith and strengthened their hearts for daily living. Not for some time did they feel the need of adding to this literature other writings distinctively descriptive of the facts and experiences of their more recent past.

One of the cardinal points in primitive Christian faith was the belief that Jesus was very soon to come again to set up his Kingdom. The first Christians waited almost momentarily for this event. Paul himself only gradually grew away from the idea. They saw no use in recording for posterity the events of Jesus' earthly life when he himself was so soon to appear to take his faithful ones to himself and "lead them into all truth." With the roll of the years and ever-recurrent disappointment this faith receded and, as those who had seen the Lord fell away, the conviction slowly ripened that a long time must elapse before this great

hope was to be realized. Out of such a conviction only could the distinctively literary motive arise.

Finally, Paul's whole emphasis minimized the tendency to look back and record what had been. He thought of Christ in heaven rather than of Christ on earth; of the risen *Christ* rather than of the earthly, historical *Jesus*. He bade men look up and ahead, not back. Paul's influence was paramount in most of the gentile Christian communities and this influence made against that interest in the past out of which our Gospels arose.

For all these reasons, no little time elapsed before the need of written accounts was felt and we can easily understand, therefore, why we have to take into consideration a fairly long interval between the death of Christ and the writing of our Gospels.

### WHAT NEEDS GAVE RISE TO THE GOSPELS?

Professor Allan Menzies, in *The Earliest Gospel*, indicates three needs always present in every religious movement. As we pass them in review, we shall see that these needs existed in the early Church and that the Gospel material was selected, indeed the Gospels themselves written and preserved, as a result of very practical motives.

Menzies says that "every religious body is seeking constantly for explanations of its own character and its own arrangements and institutions." This is a motive that actuates us to-day regarding many common practices ordinarily taken as a matter of course. Why does the United States resent and oppose any attempt of a foreign power to extend its territory in the western hemisphere? To answer this question we return to the age of James Monroe and refresh our

minds with the circumstances surrounding the original promulgation of the "Monroe Doctrine." In a case of suspected theft, why may we not go through the house of a suspect without a search-warrant? To understand this we go back to English common law by which a man is guaranteed certain inalienable rights upon his own premises. Why do we Protestants make so much of the Bible while Catholics do not? The answer must be sought in the history of Luther's controversy with Catholicism.

Similarly, the Christians of the second generation found themselves ordering their communal life in certain ways, and the questions must often have arisen: "Why do we do these things?" "Why are we Christians baptized upon entering the Christian fellowship?" "Why do we celebrate the first day of the week as the Lord's Day, instead of the seventh?" "Why do we not observe the commands of the Mosaic law as our Jewish brothers do?" "Why do we em-

phasize the Lord's Supper as a special mark of our unity?" The need of answering such questions stimulated the remembrance of those events and teachings which would best satisfy inquiring minds. For, not only would Christians themselves ask each other these things; non-Christian friends and opponents would also ask them and an answer must be had.

This situation accounts for much of the material selected. That we have only a selection is evident the moment we compare the meagerness of our reports with the undoubted extent of Jesus' teaching and activity. The author of the Gospel of John is fundamentally right when he says, with apparent over-enthusiasm: "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that should be written."

And so, in response to this need of explanation, much was remembered and writ-



ten down, among other things, about John the Baptist and the baptism of Jesus, about the teaching of Jesus concerning the Law, and about his death and resurrection. Other motives were operating too, as we shall see, but the desire to understand and explain present practice was certainly one.

Next, Menzies says: "Every religious body is seeking constantly to defend itself against attacks made on it from without." We see this motive all about us; in all sorts of organizations, religious and non-religious. Every political party has its platform and, in the heat of a campaign, arguments of all sorts, good and bad, are brought forth to demonstrate effectively the superiority of one party and its principles over all other parties and principles. Religions and religious sects adopt the same program. Not so much as in bygone generations, perhaps, for we have acquired manners and some wisdom. But a man must always stand up for his ideas, if he is a *man*, and so must relig-

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ious organizations, if they still have any salt in them.

Thus we have become familiar with Catholic preachments on the authority of the Church and Protestant insistence on the Bible; with the Episcopalian defense of the Apostolic Succession and the Baptist brief for complete immersion. And current literature, especially religious literature, bears the mark of these divisions and contentions.

One cannot read very far in any Gospel without coming upon a passage that is evidently aimed at somebody. The Book of Matthew best exemplifies this. From beginning to end it holds a brief for the thesis that Jesus' life completely fulfilled Old Testament prophecy. In the first chapter we read: "Now all this is come to pass, that it might be fulfilled . . . ."; and so it goes on to the very end of the Gospel where we read: "Then was fulfilled that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet. . . ."

It is clear that such arguments served to confirm Christians in their own faith, but they were inserted for the additional purpose of convincing outsiders, objectors, and enemies. This is evident not only from the Gospels themselves but also because it is quite in line with the reports we have elsewhere of early Christian argumentation. This motive must have been especially strong in every report that had to do with Jesus' death. Paul tells us that the Cross was "to the Jew a stumbling-block and to the Greeks foolishness." This indifferent or antagonistic attitude had to be overcome, especially in regard to such a central fact as the death of the Lord. And so, in the Book of Acts, we find Peter wrestling with the problem and, in Paul's writings, the solution of the difficulty occupies a large place.

It is inconceivable that this, and other polemical matters, should not have influenced both the form and the content of our Gospels. These questions were insistent

because they were continually raised by enemies who would not keep still. There would be no better way of answering them than by relating certain acts or sayings of Jesus himself. This is, without doubt, one of several reasons why so much space is given to the details of Jesus' last days. We may say, then, that much of our information about Jesus is undoubtedly due to the fact that questions in dispute caused certain things to be emphasized and remembered through the constant repetition of unavoidable argument.

Lastly, Professor Menzies says that every religious body "is constantly compelled to return to its source and to refresh itself at the original truth which lies at its beginning." This is the practical devotional desire which seeks to keep the spirit of the organization free from contamination and diminution. To employ once again a modern political analogy, we see in this tendency the very motive which impels us, as good Ameri-

can citizens, to remind ourselves of Lincoln and Washington, their spirit, service and ideals. Just so has it been with Christianity from the beginning. In the Book of Acts, Paul exhorts the elders at Miletus "to help the weak and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" In I Corinthians he endeavors to remedy abuses that had crept into the celebration of the Lord's Supper by reminding them of Jesus' last supper with his disciples. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews urges his hearers to "run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith."

That the selection and remembrance of most of our Gospel material was due, not to motives of explanation or polemic, but to that of practical inspiration and encouragement, is undoubted. The story of the temptation would be cherished for its practical value, if for nothing else, witnessing that the

Lord "was touched with a feeling for our infirmities." The Cross must have been held up continually as an example of "patient endurance unto the end." The Agony in the Garden would point the way to a repetition, under similar circumstances, of the prayer, "Not my will, but thine be done." The beautiful blending of patience and righteous indignation, displayed in the Master's dealings with the Pharisees, would help the disciples to maintain the proper spirit in their own relations with the same enemies. Most of the parables appealed to the apostolic Christians, as to us, because they bear directly on the problem of daily living.

In conclusion, therefore, we may say with complete conviction that our Gospels arose, not because of a purely historical motive, as we moderns understand that term, but chiefly in response to these intensely practical needs. If we remember this fact, it should help us greatly in estimating the historical reliability of the accounts. Before

we do that, however, let us try to sketch the probable process by which the Gospels came into being.

### HOW DID THE GOSPELS COME INTO BE- ING?

Jesus lived and taught. For at least twenty-five or thirty years, probably, what he had said and done was handed down merely by word of mouth. In this period of oral tradition, the motives already mentioned played a deciding part in winnowing out and shaping the reports. In the frequent disputes of the early days, the disciples would be continually asking: "What did the Lord say?" and "What did the Lord do?" Probably the sayings of Jesus were recalled more often and more accurately than his deeds.

At the same time, we must bear in mind that his sayings were reported, now in Aramaic and now in Greek; and probably, also, in Latin. For this reason, among others,

the reports would vary in form and content in different communities. This enables us to understand partly the variant forms of the same teaching in different Gospels. Probably, although we cannot prove it, written collections of sayings, or "logia," arose in different places. Some of them would be written in Aramaic, the language of Jesus and of all his Jewish contemporaries; some of them in Greek, the language which had progressively dominated the then civilized world, from the time of Alexander the Great. These collections would be many and different, meeting varied needs and reflecting differing remembrances of what Jesus had said. It is possible, too, that some of these writings contained accounts of Jesus' deeds. Still, the teaching would predominate in them.

#### THE LOGIA OF MATTHEW

The first extensive document of which we know is the so-called "Logia-Document"



of Matthew, written in Aramaic and probably in the decade 60-70 A.D. This account contained wholly, or at least chiefly, sayings of Jesus. It is undoubtedly the document referred to by Bishop Papias of the second century in these words: "Matthew composed the Logia in the Hebrew language and every one interpreted them as best he could."

It is probably due to the incorporation of much of this teaching into the Gospel of Matthew that the latter received Matthew's name. The Gospel of Matthew was written in Greek, and probably the "Logia-Document" had already gone through several editions in Greek before it was used by the author of the first Gospel. Its translation into Greek at a very early date would be just what we should expect from the prevalent use of the Greek language, even in parts of Palestine. The author of Luke also used the "Logia-Document," or rather a Greek translation of it, and this explains

many of the agreements between the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, which are largely agreements in reports of Jesus' sayings.

But we are anticipating ourselves. Thus far, we have simply the Aramaic document of Matthew, containing chiefly teachings of Jesus with, perhaps, some narrative of events. This document has been translated into Greek and is circulating in various editions, Aramaic and Greek, as Papias' statement about "interpretation" may suggest. None of our present Gospels, which were all written in Greek from the first, are yet in existence.

### THE GOSPELS

It is now commonly agreed that the Gospel of Mark was the first of our existing Gospels to be written. To quote Dr. McGiffert, this is "the first account of the deeds of Jesus of which we have any explicit information." Papias' testimony is again valuable at this point. He says: "Mark,

having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately whatever he (Mark) remembered of the things said or done by Christ, not however in order, for he had not heard the Lord, nor had he followed him; but afterward, as I said, he followed Peter, who adapted his instructions to the needs of those who heard him, but without attempting to give a connected account of the Lord's utterances. So that Mark did not err when he thus wrote some things down as he remembered them; for he was careful of one thing—not to omit any of the things which he had heard, nor to falsify anything in them.”

In estimating the value of this statement, we must allow somewhat for Papias' own views; but, as Dr. McGiffert says, “there is no reason to doubt the general accuracy of this report and there is no sufficient ground for referring Papias' words to any other work than our second Gospel.” We may say, then, that about the year 70 A.D.

Mark wrote the earliest of our Gospels, using still earlier fragments and Petrine reminiscences. Whether Mark did, or did not, know of the existence of the "Logia-Document" is uncertain. At any rate, he probably did not use it, for his work is devoted chiefly to the things which Jesus did.

The three Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, agree to a remarkable extent in content and in the order of presentation. It is generally accepted that both later writers, namely the authors of Matthew and of Luke, knew and used the account which Mark wrote or, at least, versions of it. Hence the many parallel accounts in the three Gospels, which often agree in the very words used. We have already seen that Matthew and Luke both made use of the "Logia-Document." Hence, most of the two latter gospels, Matthew and Luke, can be explained by their use of these two main sources of information.

Matthew and Luke, however, both con-

tain an amount of material not traceable to either of these two sources. This independent material doubtless came either from some of the written collections already mentioned, or from oral tradition which, it must be remembered, would not be seriously diminished by the rise of written accounts. That some process like this must be posited is clear from the prologue of Luke. This reads: "Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to draw up a narrative concerning those matters which have been fulfilled among us, even as they delivered them unto us, who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having traced the course of all things accurately from the first, to write unto thee, in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty concerning the things wherein thou wast instructed."

Whether Matthew was written before Luke, or Luke before Matthew, is a matter of dispute. We may say, however, that be-

tween the years 75 and 90 A.D., these two Gospels, compiled in the manner described, were added to the already existing Gospel of Mark. Incorporating, as they did, practically all of the "Logia-Document," they crowded the latter out of existence as an independent record.

Conservative and liberal critics alike agree that the Gospel of John presents the life of Jesus in a way peculiar to itself. There are radical differences of opinion, however, regarding its authorship and historical reliability. Even those who are most earnest in support of the Johannine authorship and of the complete historical reliability of the book, grant that it is more subjective than the other Gospels. On the other hand, most of those who reject John's authorship concede that a certain amount of new and independent historical information is contained in it. All agree that it is the latest of our four Gospels and that its author, whether John or some other, knew, and used

discriminatingly, the records already in existence. We cannot here examine the mass of complicated evidence necessary to a thorough discussion of the question. I can only present what seems to me the most probable view.

In the early years of the second century, about 100–110 A.D., a Christian disciple, living in western Asia Minor, and brought up in the circle that seems to owe its inspiration to the teaching of the apostle John, wrote this treatise on the life of Christ. He wrote it with particular reference to the speculative thought that dominated that region, due to the intermingling of Greek and oriental influences. The work is primarily interpretative, and the Philonic conception of the “Logos” (Word) is interwoven with the historic life of Jesus of Nazareth from the famous prologue to the very end. Besides the information drawn from the Synoptics, there is probably a certain amount of new and reliable historical mate-

rial secured by the author from some independent source, possibly John the Apostle. The record of the deeds and the discourses of Jesus, however, is influenced by the evident purpose of the author to present a certain view of the Master. Thus the historical reliability of the book is distinctly less than that of the other Gospels. Besides its wonderful inspirational character, it is, therefore, chiefly valuable for the light it throws on the ideas current in this section of the Christian church at the time. We must therefore depend mainly upon the three Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, for our reliable historical information regarding the actual life of Jesus of Nazareth.

The question that concerns us most, and which we are now prepared to answer, is this: *To what extent are these sources of information historically reliable?*



## HOW RELIABLE ARE THESE SOURCES?

Two answers we may reject at once: one which says that all which is told us in the Gospels is absolutely trustworthy; and the other which says that none of it is to be depended upon. Our answer must be one of discrimination, by which we recognize that the conditions under which the Gospels arose laid them open to the probability of error; and yet that these very conditions also favored the permanent retention of a large amount of historical fact.

There are *four questions* which give the thoughtful man most concern. These are the virgin birth; the physical resurrection of Jesus; the miracles Jesus is said to have performed; and finally, the question to what extent the ideas of the early Christians influenced their reports of Jesus' teaching. These are large problems and in the meager space at my disposal I cannot hope to dis-

cuss any one of them thoroughly. I may, however, point the way to a solution and also try to give a conclusion regarding the reliability of our information as a whole.

### THE VIRGIN BIRTH OF JESUS

It is interesting to note that the accounts of Jesus' birth appear only in Matthew and in Luke and that the two presentations are not at all parallel. In fact, they agree chiefly in the one central reference to the birth itself; the detailed stories go in diverse directions. They may be complementary but, at any rate, they are not parallel. In certain respects they *seem* to be contradictory, as in the genealogies and in the accounts of the home of Jesus' parents. According to Luke, Joseph and Mary come to Bethlehem from Nazareth where they had previously lived; according to Matthew, they appear to have taken up their abode in Nazareth only after the return from Egypt. I mention these things merely as

illustrative of some of the difficulties the accounts themselves present.

Further, in the subsequent parts of these two Gospels, there is no reference to the wonderful origin of Jesus, and some passages appear to make against it. Mark does not even hint at the event and, according to this Gospel, Jesus' peculiar relation to the Father seems to reach its culmination at his baptism. John's explanation of the unique relation of Jesus to God centers in the idea of the Logos, a highly exalted, heavenly being, though subordinate to God himself; represented as "becoming flesh" without any specification of the particular manner in which this occurred. Paul, as is well known, bases his thesis of the divinity of Christ on the resurrection, and never refers to the virgin birth, even in the second chapter of Philippians, where it would be most natural. The author of Hebrews conceives of Jesus as "made perfect through suffering," with the Cross as the climax.

Besides these difficulties, inherent in the New Testament writings, we to-day approach the question with a difficulty already raised in our minds as a result of science. Now, to be sure, biology cannot dispose of this matter by curtly saying: "It could not have been." No one can say: "It *could* not have been"; but one may very pertinently ask: "Was it a fact?" And the historical evidence would have to be very clear and strong to overcome the presumption biology rolls up against it.

It is because the evidence is not clear and strong that we must leave the matter in abeyance, to say the least. Certainly we should not stake our faith on a fact thus attested. I may say here that, as a matter of experience, we do not stake our faith on the truth of these particular accounts. Our view of Jesus, whatever it may be, is controlled more by what he was in his own personality and by what he became than by our conclusions regarding the manner of his birth.

And, in view of the other New Testament data, we may, perhaps, safely hold that the virgin birth was but one way, among several, by which the first Christians sought to explain what they already believed from their own experience, namely, that Jesus was the Son of God.

### THE RESURRECTION

The case lies differently with the second question, that of the resurrection of Jesus. Accounts of this event, more or less detailed, appear in all four Gospels, in the Acts, and in Paul's writings, not to mention references in other New Testament books. All agree in making this the starting-point of Christian communal activity. All agree in recording it as an actual, personal experience of many disciples, by which they were brought into a real relation with Jesus after his death. Once for all let it be said, it is historically certain that Paul and the other disciples sincerely believed that they had seen the risen

Lord; also, they were right in ascribing to this experience, whatever it was, that awakening of faith and enthusiasm out of which historical Christianity sprang.

This is, perhaps, enough for us to maintain; but most of us cannot rest there. We ask with insistence: "Were the disciples deluded?" or, "Was it a vision resulting from their previous relation with the earthly Jesus and constituting a natural reaction after the shock of his death had passed?" "If it was a real, objective appearance of Jesus, was it physical and bodily, or spiritual and psychic?"

The Gospel accounts puzzle us by their mixture of physical and ghostly attributes. At times, the writers seem to be anxious to convince their readers that it was the flesh-and-blood Jesus who had risen; again, that he had passed already into quite a different order of existence. It is difficult to tell whether the scene of these events was Galilee, or Jerusalem, or both. Luke and Acts,

both by the same author, alone relate the story of the ascension, a necessary event, of course, if Jesus' appearances during the forty days were real flesh-and-blood appearances.

Paul is our earliest witness and his careful account, in the fifteenth chapter of I Corinthians, is the best point of departure for a study of the problem. He connects his own experience with that of the earlier disciples as of the same nature, insisting always that it was a real appearance of the Lord. The accounts of his conversion, in the Book of Acts, also emphasize the objective reality of the event but seem to favor a more spiritual view than that offered by some of the Gospel accounts. Paul's own words about the resurrection, in I Corinthians, where he distinguishes between the natural and the spiritual body, also seem to favor a less material explanation. Again, his whole theological position seems to forbid the idea that the physical body has anything to do with the

resurrected state; in one place he goes so far as to say, "flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God."

Here, too, we approach the problem with a scientific presumption against the *physical* resurrection, at least. We also find the evidence somewhat lacking in clearness and in strength, though not so much as in the former case. We must face the further fact that the records of the lives of many great religious heroes have undergone transformation, surrounding their real activity with a fringe of physical miracle, especially at the beginning and at the end. Our Gospel accounts, as we have seen, were not so carefully compiled as to exclude the possibility of such changes creeping into the Christian tradition.

When all is said and done, however, the extraordinary fact remains that Paul and the other early disciples were transformed by experiences which they believed to be objectively real manifestations of the risen



Lord. Science may cause us to pause before the more materialized accounts of the Gospels, but she is, at present, rather more favorable than otherwise to the possibility of a distinct, personal, real and objective appearance of Jesus' Spirit to his disciples after his death. That Jesus personally survived his death, we must believe or deny the heart of the Christian faith; that, in his continued life, he influences his followers in one way or another, we can easily believe: that the spiritual, heavenly Lord appeared in a real and objective, though non-physical, way to the first disciples and to Paul, is by no means impossible to hold; that it was a flesh-and-blood appearance seems improbable. In any case, we have, from all this, added evidence in support of the might of that personality whom we, following Thomas, may call "my Lord and my God."

## THE MIRACLES

The question of the miracles is usually reduced to unreality by approaching it from the standpoint of the omnipotence of God. "God can do anything," it is said, "and therefore he did this particular thing." Similarly, the argument regarding the Gospel miracles often runs, "Christ, as the Son of God, was all-powerful, hence he could do anything; hence he did this particular thing." The only legitimate form in which our difficulty may be phrased is not, "What might have happened?" or, "What could happen?" but, "What did actually happen?" We must, therefore, employ a fair but rigorous historical method; try to establish the probable facts; finally, secure the most satisfactory explanation. We see at once, therefore, that there is really little value in discussing miracles in general; what is needed is a careful examination of the circumstances of each individual case. Of course, we can-

not do this here. Still, a few suggestions may be helpful.

Physical science at once confronts us with its laws; its repugnance toward the irregular; its presupposition that all could be explained if we only knew enough. Historical science, also, brings to our attention the well-known tendency of men to embellish the lives of their heroes with fanciful tales of power; and in no sphere, naturally, more than in religious narrative. Our Gospel narratives did not arise in such a way as to guarantee them against this tendency; hence our difficulty.

The practical thing to do, at the outset, is to divide the accounts of Jesus' wonders into classes, according to their degree of credibility. We may thus distinguish three classes, sufficiently distinct from one another for purposes of discussion. Most easy to believe are those relating to the casting-out of demons and the healing of other disorders more or less connected with the nervous system. To be sure, the descriptions given usu-

ally force us to guess at the symptoms, and still more, merely to guess at the nature of the disease; but the large number of cases of demoniacal possession, and the other cases that suggest nervous or mental disorder, belong to a class of pathological phenomena quite familiar to us.

Modern investigation and experience have proved that healing power is possessed by certain persons in just such cases and also that religious faith is a mighty factor in determining the result. When we join to these statements the fact that the accounts of such healing activity by Jesus are so interwoven with the record of his teaching that we cannot discredit one without discrediting the other, we can easily come to the conclusion that Jesus actually did many such things and that these accounts are essentially true, even though descriptive and interpretative details must occasionally be left on one side.

The second class of Gospel wonders, according to degree of credibility, would com-

prise the healing of diseases, or of malformations, not directly connected with the nervous system; such as the healing of lepers, of blind and of lame men. These are clearly less easy to believe because we know from experience that such things are more in bond to the physical order and less under the influence of a mental state. We must exercise care, however. Remarkable cures in modern times, at such places as Lourdes in France, have been witnessed and tested by unbiased, and even antagonistic, physicians. In the light of their testimony we cannot be too skeptical regarding the reach and power of mind, especially where religious faith enters in. At no time since the beginnings of modern science has it been easier to spread the mantle of faith over at least a part of this large class of Gospel story. Each case, however, must be sifted and weighed independently and conclusions are bound to vary.

The last class is that of purely physical wonder; such as stilling the tempest, walk-

ing on the water, turning water into wine, and the raising of Lazarus. It is to such things alone, as a matter of fact, that the term miracle, in its rightful sense, properly applies; and it is undoubtedly these that give us our greatest difficulty. The only way by which a *modern* man can come to believe these things is by attaining to such a faith in the unique power of Jesus, on other grounds, that he is able and willing to extend that power over such phenomena also. In so doing, he would have to triumph over certain very stubborn objections: the presumption raised by modern science; the frequency of such stories in the accounts of the lives of other religious leaders; Jesus' own words regarding "signs and wonders"; the circumstances under which the Gospels arose, not only allowing, but even favoring, exaggeration and fanciful creation in this particular. We may approach the problem with ease of mind, however, remembering that none of these stories is really essential

to our historical picture of Jesus, or to our fundamental Christian faith.

It is not strange that the question of miracle has been the storm-center of theological controversy. The protagonists of miracle have sensed clearly the inevitable result of part, at least, of the activity of their opponents. That result would be the elimination of the idea of and belief in the supernatural in any form. On the other hand, the zeal of many defenders of the faith has outrun their knowledge and discretion. They have identified belief in God's direct and benign dealings with men with belief in physical miracle, or with belief in biblical miracles *per se*. Many of us are deeply interested in maintaining a vital faith in the supernatural; a vital faith in God's direct and benign dealings with men. We are also interested in resisting any unjustifiable encroachment of science upon the peculiar territory of religion. These very reasons should make us equally keen to detect unfair religious en-

croachments upon the field of science. They should make us keen to reject the false identification of belief in the supernatural with either belief in physical miracle or belief in biblical miracles *per se*.

### THE TEACHING OF JESUS

The last historical question we must answer has to do with the reliability of the accounts of Jesus' teaching. While his teaching would probably be more accurately remembered and recorded than his deeds, we cannot but ask whether the ideas of the Jewish and gentile Christians, through whom the traditions had to go, affected the accounts to any extent. These men believed intensely in the near approach of the Kingdom, at the second coming of Christ; they believed in Jesus as the Messiah and sought to prove his messiahship from the Old Testament; they believed that the death of Jesus had some connection with salvation from sin and wrath; and they held the resurrection to



be the central fact of their religion. In all these things, they thought and *had* to think in accordance with the current conceptions of their day.

It is apparent at once that, granted the existence of certain views in the early Church, there would be a natural tendency to seek in Jesus' teaching the justification of those views; to interpret neutral sayings in a favorable way; to pass over into conscious, or unconscious modification of the tradition itself. The parts of Jesus' teaching especially open to such processes are those where Jesus speaks of his peculiar relation to God; those in which the coming of the Kingdom is pictured in terms very like the ordinary Jewish conception—a Kingdom soon to be set up by wonderful, supernatural means and accompanied by signs and portents; finally, those passages in which Jesus foretells, and even hints at the significance of, his death and resurrection. In other words the problem is: "What did Jesus teach about the

nature of the Kingdom of heaven and its establishment?" and, "What did he teach concerning his own Person?"

In the present state of the problem, I do not see that we can make our answer as explicit as we should like. Doubtless in these and in other passages Jesus' words have been somewhat altered in transmission. On the other hand, the historical student and "the man on the street" will not go far wrong if they formulate, as the correct historical fact, the general impression of Jesus' teaching which even a cursory reading of the Gospels may give. In other words, whether Jesus himself taught, or did not teach, the speedy, miraculous coming of the Kingdom, the general character and quality of that Kingdom are perfectly evident from a host of references. And it is not so essential as many think to know what Jesus taught regarding himself. In spite of all negative criticism, we have an historical picture of Jesus' life and of its beneficent re-

sults which, in the long run, will control our estimate of him, regardless of his own self-witness.

The Gospels, like other documents of the past, must be examined according to strict historical methods. So examined, we find the material they contain varying in historical value. The elimination of certain accounts as untrue and the shelving of others as open to question do not deprive the documents of their priceless historical worth. Compared with other records of antiquity, they stand out as unusual examples of historically reliable writing and from them we can secure all the information that is practically necessary regarding the life, teaching and personality of Jesus of Nazareth.

## CHAPTER II

### THE LIFE OF JESUS

FOR the intelligent layman the problems raised by biblical criticism become most acute when they concern the Gospels and the life of Christ. Many easily grant the necessity and value of applying critical tests to the Old Testament but shrink from applying them to the Gospels. This hesitation is natural and deserves consideration but it is none the less mistaken. The historical method is only "trained and informed common-sense," and those who use it seek the truth just as we all seek it in our every-day experience, only less crudely. There is no reason why the Gospels should be exempt from such a method of investigation; in fact, there is

every reason why they should not be. If it is in them that we find the touchstone of our destiny, then it is incumbent upon us to make sure what that touchstone really is.

Historical criticism, applied to the Gospels and to the life of Christ, has achieved results which are sure and extensive enough to satisfy fair-minded men. Extremists of both camps will doubtless continue to wage war, but the "man in the street" is in a mood to cry, "A plague on both your houses." Even when he does not know very much about it he suspects that everything cannot be accepted; he also suspects that the truth is not along the path of sweeping denial. These suspicions turn to convictions when he seriously studies the question.

With this mood upon us, therefore, let us try to set forth the probable course of Jesus' life. Criticism, with all its detail of analysis, comparison, inference and construction, is here assumed. Many incidents, true and important, will not be mentioned, for our aim

is not a "life" but a brief sketch. The nature and content of Jesus' teaching, as such, will not be discussed. All these important matters must here be subordinated to the main aim which is to answer the question, "In the light of modern criticism, what is reasonably certain regarding the general course of Jesus' life?"

#### THE EARLY INFLUENCES UNDER WHICH JESUS LIVED

The historian does not ask, "How *might* Jesus have been born?" nor, "How *must* he have been born?" but simply "Under what circumstances *was* he born?" Our sources of information do not enable us to answer explicitly. It is not clear just when he was born, nor where, nor under what circumstances. It is certain that this significant event in the history of mankind occurred near the end of the reign of Herod the Great, somewhere in what we now call Palestine. It is not unlikely that he was the

son of Joseph and Mary and that he was born in Nazareth of Galilee.

Concerning the days of his youth and young manhood, we have no clear information. The story of his visit to Jerusalem at the age of twelve (Luke 2: 39-52) may not be historical, but it is certainly in keeping with any inferences that may fairly be drawn from his later development. If we are to reconstruct any picture of this period of Jesus' life, it must be by means of such inference and a few initial facts afforded us by the Gospels.

Flowing out of the past, from the Old Testament and especially from the prophets, streams of influence poured in upon him, through the channels of home and synagogue. In his reported teaching Jesus mentions by name Noah, Solomon, David, Elijah, Elisha, Jonah and the Queen of Sheba, and there are many other references which prove that he knew the Old Testament thoroughly. Whatever else we may or may

not believe regarding his conception of himself, we are constrained to hold that he considered his life and teaching the consummation of Old Testament prophecy, and that he builded consciously on the basis of truth the prophets had already laid down.

Regarding his early environment, we know that he had four brothers and at least two sisters, and it is probable that he learned the trade of his father, who was a master-builder in Nazareth. He must have been intimately acquainted with the simple, homely things of life and cognizant of all phases of the common lot of the Jews of his day. Though probably not intimate with the rich, his experience was doubtless not confined to Nazareth and its village folk. It is quite likely that our mental picture should include visits to Jerusalem and to the larger towns of Galilee where Greco-Roman culture had considerable standing. The Jewish scribes undoubtedly influenced him positively as well as negatively, for, while he rejected



the rabbinical system absolutely, there were broad-minded exponents of rabbinism, like Rabbi Hillel, whose loftier teaching was not unlike that of Jesus himself.

It is only fair to assume that these hereditary and environmental forces imparted form as well as content to Jesus' expanding thought, but they do not explain his exalted personality. Every life is more or less a mystery, but such a life is supremely mysterious because it is a supremely new creation. In ways that we cannot fathom, Jesus experienced during these formative years a new relationship to God. His religious consciousness was maturing along lines which constituted a new departure in man's religious history. Fused with this fundamental element of his life, there arose within him a new understanding of man's real nature and of his proper relationship to his fellowman, a new ethical consciousness. The range, quality and significance of this new life within him could not fail to produce a

peculiar self-consciousness; a realization that he, the bearer of these new spiritual gifts, stood in a peculiar relation to the Father and to his fellowmen.

This new consciousness—religious, ethical, personal—whose development in Jesus we can trace historically, though with extreme meagerness, may constitute for us the center and source of our belief in the saving revelation of God to man. Thus “historical development” and “divine revelation” become, to this extent, counterparts. And thus, also, this unique development of the consciousness of Jesus constitutes his divinity. The Christ-consciousness compels us to cry out, “What is this, if not divine?” “Whence is this, if not from God?”

We are obliged to postulate such an inner development in the days of Jesus’ youth and young manhood, else his later life becomes an entire enigma. With charming characterization, the Gospel of Luke reflects the similar judgment of the early Church:

“And the child grew and waxed strong in spirit” (Luke 1:80). Again: “And Jesus advanced in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men” (Luke 2:52).

### THE CALL TO THE MESSIANIC LIFE

That John the Baptist preceded Jesus, baptized him, and in more essential ways prepared the way for him, is certain. That he sustained such a conscious relation to Jesus as the Gospels of Matthew and John record is improbable. John was largely the product of Old Testament prophecy and of the Jewish messianic hope of the Roman period. The latter gave him a hearing, the former gave him his hold. There is ample ground for the estimate of him pronounced by Jesus and treasured by Christians ever since. He stirred the religious and ethical consciousness of the people so that they were more ready for Jesus' appeal. He gathered around him a group of adherents who were thus prepared to become Jesus' chief sup-

porters. He inaugurated the rite of baptism which, with him, differed from all previously known religious lustrations and furnished the basis for later Christian practice. Finally, he baptized Jesus himself.

The nature of the baptismal accounts and the testimony of the later parts of the Synoptic Gospels warrant our holding that, at his baptism, Jesus had an unusual inner experience which determined his whole after-life. It is not strange that his sensitive and ever-expanding consciousness should have recognized in the mission of John a peculiar significance. The previous development in Jesus' inner life would lead him to sympathize with John's movement and, with others, to join it through the rite of baptism. This notable event seems to have brought his developing experience to a focus and to have given him divine assurance of the rightness and reality of his own relation to God and to man. It convinced him that in his own life lay the hope of men, and naturally,

being a Jew of his own time, he associated his experience and work with the messianic idea and began to think of himself, probably, as Messiah. This would mean that he considered himself the chief messenger of God to man. The ultimate validity of this conviction and its significance for us depend upon the nature and significance of his whole life. That alone can prove to us that his lofty self-consciousness was justified. Jesus probably did not relate these experiences till later in his life, and then only to his closest friends. If this is true, the externalized features of the baptismal accounts in Matthew and in Luke must be considered unhistorical.

The gaining of any new height of achievement carries with it peculiar perils, and the application of new truth to a work-a-day world presents subtle temptations. The temptation which presented itself to Jesus at this time arose from these two psychological conditions. The parabolic accounts

given us by Matthew and Luke really revolve about the one thought of compromise. "Yield the truth a bit in order to get men to take it." That there was not merely one period of temptation we should have to assume, even if we did not have the story of the Agony in the Garden. With the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews we can be sure that Jesus was "one that hath been in all points tempted." But, doubtless, the glory of the baptismal experience was followed by a correspondingly searching trial. Old Testament passages came to his aid. The remembrance of the recent vision was fresh upon him and girded the loins of his will. These things, together with his now vivid sense of a present Father able to help, carried him through the first great test to a life of victory over all subsequent temptations, even those of the last excruciating days. Back of the accounts lies no external struggle, nor yet a mere phantom of early interpretation. It was a real but inward event

which Jesus probably related to his disciples at a later time in parabolic terms. Jesus now stands at the threshold of his life-work.

### THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE MINISTRY

The scene and length of Jesus' activity cannot be accurately determined. The insufficiency of our sources of information leaves these matters in the twilight. Whether his ministry lasted one year or three, we cannot say. How much time he spent in Galilee, Perea, Samaria and Judea, respectively, we cannot tell. It is certain that until the last days he was chiefly in Galilee. But he spent some time in Perea also and undoubtedly visited Samaria. It is probable, also, that he went to Judea and Jerusalem during his ministry, that is, before the final journey that ended with his death. It is Galilee, however, which looms largest in our records, then Jerusalem in the last days and, to a lesser degree, Perea.

## THE EARLY PREACHING

We are told that he began in Galilee to preach the "gospel of the Kingdom." What that "Good News" was we shall not discuss here. The effect of his preaching was, at first, a general impression of authority. Mark says: "And they were astonished at his teaching; for he taught them as having authority, and not as the scribes." This, of course, was not any external or official authority. The scribes possessed that sort of authority and they had been weighed in the balance and found wanting. Nor was it merely because he considered himself to be the Messiah. It was because he was what he was.

Besides preaching, Jesus certainly performed acts of healing, chiefly on those who thought themselves possessed by demons. He doubtless healed other disorders and diseases also. The motive of this activity was not the exhibition of power for the sake of



proving his messiahship, or his divinity, as the Fourth Gospel pictures it. At this time, at least, he kept to himself his thoughts of himself and he discouraged his followers from giving an undue prominence either to his works or to himself. The motive back of this, as of all his activity, was that of love, and Matthew is right in quoting in this connection a passage from Second Isaiah (Isa. 53: 4): "Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses."

The result of all this teaching and of his many deeds of kindness, evidencing his great love of his fellows, was an unbounded popularity. He was not thereby deceived, however. He knew that the real advance of the Kingdom whose interests he had at heart was taking place only slowly and in varying degrees. The parable of the Sower reveals this. "Behold, the sower went forth to sow; and as he sowed, some seeds fell by the wayside, and the birds came and devoured them: and others fell on the rocky places, where

they had not much earth; and straightway they sprang up, because they had no deepness of earth: and when the sun was risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And others fell among thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked them; and others fell upon the good ground, and yielded fruit, some a hundred fold, some sixty, some thirty" (Matt. 13: 3-9). He knew that the hold he had on the many was too slight to keep them from losing interest when difficulties arose.

### EARLY DIFFICULTIES

These difficulties soon came, for Jesus' plain speaking quickly aroused the opposition of the rabbis and brought about the great conflict which culminated at the Cross. In Mark 3: 6 we read: "And the Pharisees went forth and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him." John 6: 66 accurately represents the effect of this opposition upon

the mass of his following in words which, however, are given a different historical setting: "From that time many of his disciples went back and walked no more with him." Mark 7:24 describes the effect on Jesus' own plans: "And from thence he arose and went into the borders of Tyre and Sidon [that is, outside the immediate sphere of the rabbis' influence] and entered into an house, and would have no man know it." In short, the rabbis effectually stopped Jesus' extended public activity in Galilee and obliged him to withdraw to quieter scenes with a small band of devoted disciples.

Jesus now realizes clearly the necessity of intensive work with the few instead of extensive work with the many. He rightly estimates the final result of the rabbinical campaign against him and begins to forecast the final issue. Either they must change, or he must yield, or he must die. That they would change he knew to be most improbable, that he should yield was impossible.

He must have seen, therefore, that his death was inevitable and he must have begun, at least, to work out the reasonableness of it in order to bring it into harmony with his idea of God and with his own relation to the Father. Thoughts like that of Mark 10: 45 must have been in his mind increasingly: "For even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many." We do not know how far Jesus went toward a solution of the problem of the Cross and he leaves us free to form our own theories of it. The Gospels support the conclusion to which our natural inferences would lead. He at least submitted to his fate, believing it to be the will of God and believing, also, that his death would, in some way, advance the interests of the Kingdom.

For a time he kept all these thoughts to himself. The disciples were not prepared to understand or to endure them. Weeks of close intercourse, however, in these days of

comparative retirement, must have enlightened their minds and strengthened their wills. At any rate, at the end of his sojourn in the northern districts, Jesus seems to have broken to them his dire forebodings. In Mark, these teachings do not appear until the time of Peter's confession, and the psychological situation makes this view of the matter so fitting that we may conclude that any contrary representation found in the other Gospels is due to unhistorical transposition or to later reflection.

### THE CHANGE AT CAESAREA PHILIPPI

Peter's confession came as a result of the close association with Jesus during the days of retirement in the north, and it was evidently of great significance both to Jesus and to his disciples. The Markan account (Mark 8: 27-30) reads: "And Jesus went forth, and his disciples into the villages of Caesarea Philippi: and on the way he asked his disciples, saying unto them, 'Who do men say

that I am?' And they told him, saying, 'John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but others, one of the Prophets.' And he asked them, 'But who say ye that I am?' Peter answereth and saith unto him, 'Thou art the Christ.' And he charged them that they should tell no man of him." In John, this important event is given another historical setting and the passage shows signs of the author's peculiar viewpoint, but the essential content is the same: "Upon this many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Jesus said therefore unto the twelve, 'Would ye also go away?' Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life, and we have believed and know that thou art the Holy One of God'" (John 6: 66-69).

Jesus felt that he had been deserted by all but the very few. If they did not maintain their faith in him, no one would. There was great risk in thus forcing the issue but he accepted it. Great souls must always take

chances and cast the die. The test was successful. He was able to clinch their faith in him, temporarily at least. This partially fortified them against the difficulties of the teaching he was about to give them, and of the heart-searching experiences through which they were all so soon to go.

### JESUS' EXPECTATION OF DEATH AND RESURRECTION

According to Mark and the other Synoptic Gospels which follow Mark's order of events, immediately after Peter's confession Jesus began to emphasize the suffering and death to come. In Mark 8: 31-37 we read: "And he began to teach them, that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders, and the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he spake the saying openly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him. But he, turning about, and seeing his disciples, rebuked Peter, and saith,

‘Get thee behind me, Satan; for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men.’ And he called unto him the multitude with his disciples, and said unto them, ‘If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me. For whosoever would save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s shall save it. For what doth it profit a man, to gain the whole world, and forfeit his life? For what should a man give in exchange for his life?’”

To this passage we may add Mark 9:9–10: “And as they were coming down from the mountain, he charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, save when the Son of Man should have risen again from the dead. And they kept the saying, questioning among themselves what the rising again from the dead should mean.” Also, Mark 9:31–32: “For he taught his disciples, and said unto them, ‘The Son of Man is delivered up into the hands of men,



and they shall kill him; and when he is killed, after three days he shall rise again.' ” And Mark 10:33-34: “ Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man shall be delivered unto the chief priests and the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him unto the Gentiles: and they shall mock him, and shall spit upon him, and shall scourge him, and shall kill him; and after three days he shall rise again.” And finally, Mark 10:45, already quoted: “ For the Son of Man also came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

We must bear in mind, in using these passages, the probability of their reflecting in part the views of a later time when the death and resurrection of Jesus had acquired paramount importance and a more definite significance. It seems to me, however, that we may fairly conclude from them that Jesus spoke of his death at this time and that he considered it God's will for him.

The fifty-third chapter of Isaiah would help him reach the conclusion that suffering belonged to the Messiah's part. His death would thus present itself to him as the logical outcome, under the circumstances, of his life-principle of love and service and also, probably, as a means of blessing to many. We should have to assume the rise in his mind of thoughts like these, had we no references at all purporting to give his direct teaching.

Similarly, with regard to the specific sayings referring to his resurrection, it may be that these verses merely record what, in the light of their experiences, later disciples thought he must have said. Doubtless the definiteness of some of the statements is due to this fact. But, on the other hand, Jesus' own thought must have run out beyond his death. His faith in the Father and in the supreme worth of his own life and mission would not allow him to stop there. Furthermore, it is inconceivable that he would im-

part to his followers his innermost fears regarding the end of his life and work without communicating to them also whatever he had within him of faith, hope and encouragement. We may not know just what he thought or said. But that he himself anticipated his death, without anticipating anything more, is out of keeping with what we know of him. And that he consciously led his disciples to anticipate his death, without leading them any further into paths of faith and hope, is equally out of keeping.

In John 14:16-20 we read: "And I will pray the Father and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth: whom the world cannot receive; for it beholdeth him not, neither knoweth him: ye know him: for he abideth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you desolate: I come unto you. Yet a little while, and the world beholdeth me no more; but ye behold me: because I live, ye shall live also. In that

day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you." These words of the author of the Fourth Gospel represent for me what must actually have been the essential trend of Jesus' thought at this time and, as I have already indicated, what he himself thought he must, under the circumstances, have communicated to his disciples in some form or other.

Back of the transfiguration story, in spite of its evident embellishments, there may lie a real experience of an exalted nature—an experience which Jesus shared with his closest friends, growing out of the kind of conversation that was now uppermost with them. The accounts which we have of the event connect it with this point in Jesus' life, and with the very circle of thought we have just been considering. Such an experience must have led to a further strengthening of the faith of the three disciples immediately concerned—Peter, James, and John. If these inferences are at all warrant-

able, we have here another example of the intensive effort Jesus now felt called upon to put forth that his work might survive his impending death.

### THE LAST JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM

With such heartening memories Jesus "sets his face toward Jerusalem." His state of mind seems to have been one of exaltation tinged, however, with natural forebodings. In Mark 10:32 we read: "And they were on the way, going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus was going before them: and they were amazed; and they that followed were afraid. And he took again the twelve, and began to tell them the things that were to happen unto him." Here we see Jesus, brave, hopeful and even triumphant, marching through Perea beyond Jordan, with Jerusalem as his goal, "knowing the things that should befall him there."

Mark, our earliest source, indicates that

in this brief period before the end, Jesus again engaged in more public activity. Mark 10:1 reads: "And he arose from thence, and cometh into the borders of Judea and beyond the Jordan: and multitudes come together unto him again; and, as he was wont, he taught them again." Mark assigns to this period a considerable amount of undoubtedly genuine teaching. Luke gathers together at this point a much larger amount of Jesus' teaching, drawn partly from the "Logia-Document" and partly from his own independent sources (cf. Luke, chaps. 9-18). Luke's arrangement here is undoubtedly topical because Matthew gives many parallels to these sections of Luke, but places them in different historical settings. The common idea of Jesus' "Perean ministry," so-called, is drawn from Luke and therefore needs to be modified by the considerations just mentioned; but, it is undoubtedly a fact that Jesus repeated in Perea, though in smaller degree, the public

activity which marked his earlier work in Galilee.

### THE LAST WEEK IN JERUSALEM

A few short crowded days in the Jewish capital, and the machinations of the leaders of his people were crowned with success. Jesus was tried, tortured and executed. Out of the many events and voluminous teaching of these last days many of our most precious Gospel traditions come. To be sure, accretions have crept into the teaching and incidents have been added without warrant. A simple parting-meal has been started on its course of transformation into a miraculous mystery, and in the Fourth Gospel Jesus is represented discoursing in the terms of Alexandrian philosophy. In general, however, the tradition is sound and we get a more detailed picture of Jesus here than at any other point in his life. To reproduce this picture would transgress the limits of our space and is hardly necessary.

A few illustrations will bring to mind the exceptional quantity and quality of Jesus' activity in these days.

In spite of the plots of his enemies, he received homage in private from individuals, and in public from the many, especially from the provincials thronging to the Passover. The story of the "Anointing at Bethany" and the main facts of the "Triumphal Entry" are undoubtedly historical. After his Galilean and Perea triumphs, he would naturally be the center of attention at the great feast and would arouse enthusiasm among the many representatives from these provinces. The latter story has doubtless been embellished, however, to make it fit into Old Testament prophecy. Similarly, the story of the "Cursing of the Fig Tree" is probably an example of the development of a parable into a miracle.

One of the most interesting phases of the last week of Jesus' life is his direct clash with the authorities. We feel the thrill that



manifestations of righteous indignation always cause, and we get a new conception of the way in which virility and loving-kindness may be united in the harmony of a single ideal. According to the Gospel of John, Jesus began his work with the so-called "Cleansing of the Temple," and we therefore usually assume that there were two occasions on which Jesus performed this act. Undoubtedly the Synoptics are right in placing this striking event at the end of Jesus' life, and the author of John has transferred it to the beginning for some reason of his own.

The questions put to Jesus by the Jewish leaders are just what we should expect from the rabbis in their effort to secure some basis for a valid charge against the Galilean. The only result of their questions has been to provide us with a permanent proof not only of Jesus' superior moral insight but also of his great intellectual acumen. These questions and answers paved the way naturally

for a final invective on the part of Jesus against rabbinism and against its representatives. Seldom have men been so scathingly and yet so justly excoriated. "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchers, which outwardly appear beautiful, but inwardly are full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also appear righteous unto men, but inwardly ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity" (Matt. 23: 27-28).

How much of the reported discourses about the coming of the Kingdom (Matt., chap. 24; Mark, chap. 13; Luke, chap. 21) comes from Jesus, and how much from early Christian tradition, is impossible to say. Doubtless Jesus discussed these subjects at length with his disciples, especially at the close of his life, but we cannot be sure of the nature of these discussions.

It would seem as if the Fourth Gospel's account of the "Last Supper" were more true to fact than the accounts given by the

other three. John relates the circumstances very simply and joins with the account of the Supper itself that of the symbolic act of "Jesus Washing the Disciples' Feet." The Synoptics append to the record of the customary meal, with its discussion of "the Betrayal," an account of the special institution by Jesus of an unusual rite, symbolic of his death and of its religious significance. The Synoptic account is probably influenced by later ideas, but in any case the last meal of the disciples with Jesus must have been impressive and significant both to them and to him.

But we must not follow the details further. Jesus maintained his cause to the very end, battling in virile fashion against the enemies from without and against those "that were of his own household." His followers were evidently always in his thought and he spent much time preparing them for the inevitable outcome. He himself turned continually to the Father in the spirit of the

garden prayer, "Not my will, but thine, be done." Jesus' death has been theologized out of all true perspective. The unalterable fact that it was the climax of his life of love and service has thereby been attested, but often in unmeaning, if not actually illogical and anti-ethical, terms. We do not have to be trained theologians to understand either the necessity of the Cross or its main significance. The essential values of this supreme event lie near the surface, but they also run down deep into the very heart of the meaning of life.

### THE RESURRECTION

We must now endeavor to estimate the significance of the resurrection stories. The signs and portents, the empty grave, the definite period of three days, the physical appearances, the forty-day period and the ascension—all these phenomena are definitely bound up with a physical explanation of the resurrection. As we have seen, the diffi-

culties in the way of this explanation point to the improbability of its being the true one. If so, then we have to choose between two other theories. The first is that of an objectively real, but non-physical, manifestation of the spirit of Jesus to the disciples. This theory is comparatively easy to grasp, provided one grants the possibility of such an objective, spiritual appearance, but it does not allow much room for the psychological element which many feel must always be given a prominent place in the explanation of any religious phenomenon. However, such activities as those of the Society for Psychical Research are symptomatic of present-day open-mindedness in this direction, even in scientific circles. In fact, there is no insuperable difficulty in the way of the modern man who inclines to the acceptance of this explanation. On the contrary, certain tendencies in modern psychology and philosophy pave the way to such a belief.

The second theory would necessitate an explanation something like this: Jesus' impartation of spiritual life to his followers, especially to the receptive and impressionable Peter, was too great to be wiped out even by so paralyzing and unintelligible a calamity as his death. Certain words of Jesus, conveying hope at a time when all seemed dark, would linger in the mind. It may also be that these words expressed a belief in a speedy return and establishment of the Kingdom. After the first despair, due to Jesus' departure, the new life they possessed from him was brought to a focus by their return to Galilee, and possibly, also, by definite forecasts of their Master. It then produced in these men, of an age, race and clime predisposing them to such things, and first of all in Peter, whose individual temperament was most favorable to such impressions, a series of "visions." These were inner, spiritual experiences, easily propagated from individual to individual, and from in-

dividuals to groups. Thus they spread, probably from Peter first, as the records all suggest, and in every case colored, most naturally, by the content of Jesus' personality by which their lives were dominated.

On either of these two theories, the relation of our existing Gospel accounts of the resurrection to the original experience would be the same. The actual event, whatever it was, little by little became materialized in the progress of the tradition until the narratives became what they now are.

For a modern man, the choice appears to lie between these two views. In either case, the resurrection accounts prove the actual existence of a spiritual life and power which enabled men to brave danger and death in an unpopular cause, for an unpopular person; a spiritual life and power which, on sure historical grounds, we can connect with the life of Jesus of Nazareth; a spiritual life and power which, through these men, has come down through the centuries in ever-

increasing fulness, purity and beneficence. These facts must be interpreted in accordance with the thought-atmosphere of our age, but they must be interpreted, and no interpretation is true to fact which does not recognize the spiritual supremacy of Jesus of Nazareth in the life of the world. Thus, instead of a supposedly objective physical fact, supporting a structure full of difficult dogmas, we get an objective, or at least equally real, spiritual fact—a mass of such facts, indeed—which goes to support the reality and supremacy of the spiritual life of Jesus. Through him we may rise to belief in a God, of like-minded love and righteousness, whose hand directs the destiny of the whole universe of men and things.



## CHAPTER III

### THE TEACHING OF JESUS

So much is made of the supposed insufficiency and uncertainty of the Gospels that it is well to lay this bogey to rest at once, so far as the teaching of Jesus is concerned. Of course, we should like to have a much fuller record, but that is no reason for shutting our eyes to the fact that we have, nevertheless, a fairly large amount of reported teaching. But is it credibly reported? This question raises serious problems into which we cannot enter here. But the existence of these problems need not paralyze our practical judgment. We may leave much in doubt without depriving ourselves of the assurance that we do know, or can know, the

main lines along which Jesus' thought ran. To be sure, Jesus spoke in Aramaic and all the Gospels were written in Greek. Further, the accounts of what he said have certainly been influenced by the minds through which the stream of tradition flowed. But let all be said that can be said, and we may still maintain that we know what Jesus taught.

#### METHOD OF INTERPRETATION

A few words about interpretation. In interpreting the Bible many mistakes are made and many errors arise. Jesus' teaching has not been exempt from these things. It is so easy to see in a word what we wish to see in it and it is so comfortable to insert our pet convictions in a verse, surreptitiously, and then to draw them out again triumphantly, with an air of scientific discovery and of divine authority. In interpreting the teaching of Jesus we must not change parables into allegories, seeking all sorts of complicated meanings where usu-

ally one great truth is to be found. We must remember that "the words of Jesus are important, not as precepts, but as indicative of principles," for he was not interested in regulating the outward life but in filling the soul with divine enthusiasm. In fine, we must always be alive to the underlying principles and then regard them as revelations of Jesus' own mind; for he was not so much a teacher of spiritual life as a revealer of it. Thus Paul was quite right in emphasizing the spirit against the letter, and in this emphasis he followed in the footsteps of the Master.

#### THE INWARD EMPHASIS OF JESUS' TEACHING AND HIS ATTITUDE TOWARD THE LAW

Matthew Arnold, with his usual keenness of insight, realized that a dominant note in Jesus' words was that of *inwardness*. It does not require the insight of a Matthew Arnold to discern this, however. The most

striking thing about Christianity has been its unerring tendency to lay its finger on the heart; on the thoughts, motives, impulses and purposes of men; on all the inner cross- and counter-currents that go to make up our real life in the everyday world.

This element of Jesus' teaching most naturally appears in strongest light where the Jewish law is discussed. We are prone to think of Paul as the great protagonist of faith, the spirit and the inner life, against dead works, the mere letter of life and the externalism of legalism. In this we are right. Paul's fight meant the possibility of full freedom for the Christian movement and his victory meant its realization. But we must remember that Paul was merely the captain who led the last assault in a campaign that had been conducted, indeed, for centuries; from the skirmishes of the Hebrew prophets to the fundamental plan of attack revealed in the Gospels by the greatest of spiritual commanders.

Jesus' attitude toward the law was prophetic, rather than scribal. That is, it was vital rather than formal, inward rather than outward, spiritual rather than literal. There is nothing more stirring or more searching in the whole Bible, nay, in all literature, than the series of antithetic passages in the fifth chapter of Matthew, beginning in each case, "Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time," and ending with, "But I say unto you." There is a sureness of aim here that begets confidence and wins admiration, both because of that which the shots destroy and that which they spare and defend. One is tempted to quote at length but a few verses must suffice: "Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment; but I say unto you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment. . . . Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt not commit adultery; but I

say unto you that every one that looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.<sup>1</sup>”

It may be that our usual idea of Paul, as a more outspoken antagonist of the law than Jesus, is due to his methods of presentation. However, to Paul the law was still “a slave to bring us unto Christ.” Jesus, too, seems to have been accustomed to send inquirers back to the law, bidding them seek light from it. But, close as these two ideas are, there is a difference. For Paul, the work of the law was done. It was all a thing of the past. Christ had ended it. The present was the age of the Spirit and there was a clear break between the two, of time as well as

<sup>1</sup> Matt. 5:21-24, 27-28, 38-48. In this article I shall use, of course, only such teaching of Jesus as I consider genuine. One or two reservations will be indicated later. I may say, further, that the teaching selected, minor details aside, is not seriously questioned by those critics whose leadership is worthy of acceptance. The genuine teaching of Jesus far exceeds, in amount, that utilized here. Limits of space compel a selection but I have tried to make the selection thoroughly representative.

of quality. Jesus, on the contrary, seemed to think of the law not as superseded but as outgrowing itself, so to speak. In it were continually to be found the germinating seeds of a new life that was to fulfil the law. "Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets: I came not to destroy but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law, till all things be accomplished." <sup>1</sup>

This is a strong passage and not without disquieting suggestions. The "jot and tittle" phraseology sounds altogether rabbinical, and it may be that we have here the work of some misguided Jewish Christian, anxious to save the orthodoxy of the Master. I am inclined to think this is the case. But, on the other hand, one of the guiding principles of a correct interpretation of Jesus' teaching is a recognition of his tendency to push a truth to the extreme, in order to

<sup>1</sup> Matt. 5:17-20.

get it out into the open, as it were, free from the inevitable background of expediency. The famous "turn the cheek" passage is an example of this and it may be that the present passage is another. This does not seem at all likely, however, for the Jews did not need to be harangued into legalism, nor was Jesus at all interested in that sort of thing. The meaning may possibly be that the law contains the gist of the whole matter, therefore we cannot think of its passing away any more than of the disappearance of the eternal truth of which it is the bearer.

But we do not have to base on such disputable ground the thesis that Jesus sought and found, inside the law itself, the interpretative principle of the new life. In Matthew and in Luke we have parallel accounts of the famous question of the lawyer. "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? And he said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering



said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do and thou shalt live.”

The lawyer's answer to his own question was taken partly from Deuteronomy and partly from Leviticus, and Jesus stamped it with the seal of his approval.<sup>1</sup> On another occasion he expressed the opinion that “every scribe who hath been made a disciple to the Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a man that is a householder, who bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, the law is far from discarded. It is God's law and salvation is in it. “This do and thou shalt live.” But the law must be interpreted according to a principle to be found within itself, a principle that has

<sup>1</sup> Luke 10:25-28; Matt. 22:34-40; Deut. 6:4; Lev. 19:17-18.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 13:52.

to do with the heart and the motives. A sifting process results by which the wheat of the permanent is separated from the temporary Jewish chaff.

Jesus did not content himself with mere enunciation of the principle, leaving the application to us. He applied it rigorously to the contemporaneous perversions which characterized Pharisaism, in language which has become classic. Indeed, orations of invective might quite as reasonably be called "rabbinics" as "philippics." When the Pharisees were quibbling about the relation of hand-washing to religion, Jesus uttered the trenchant saying, "There is nothing from without the man, that going into him can defile him; but the things which proceed out of the man are those that defile the man."<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere scorn is heaped upon rabbinical exaggeration and hypocrisy in words of cutting irony and indignant emo-

<sup>1</sup> Mark 7: 1-23.

tion. "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye cleanse the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full from extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first the inside of the cup and of the platter, that the outside thereof may become clean also."<sup>1</sup>

This invective is directed against rabbinical refinements of the law, but it is clear that Jesus everywhere subordinates the legal and ceremonial elements of the original law to his inner principle and practically excludes them from consideration. Thus we see that Matthew Arnold was right in holding up inwardness as a fundamental mark of Christian teaching.

### CHRISTIAN INWARDNESS

But mere inwardness is, to a large extent, a colorless term; a formal description without essential content. We now

<sup>1</sup> Matt. 23.

know where to look, but we do not yet know what to look for. To be sure, when we learn that righteousness is a thing of the heart and not a matter of washing pots, pans, cups and platters, we have made progress. This progress carries us beyond and above the boggy levels of Pharisaism, but it does not bring us to the fork of the road where the peculiarly Christian path leads out. In other words, there are kinds of inwardness not distinctively Christian, and thus we see that Matthew Arnold's criterion is only a tentative and partial one, not final. "Out of the heart are the issues of life," no matter what those issues may be. Envy is quite as inward as benevolence. Hatred is quite as inward as love. Lust is just as much a thing of the heart as purity. "That which proceedeth out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, evil thoughts proceed, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, covetings, wickednesses, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, railing,

pride, foolishness: all these evil things proceed from within, and defile the man.”<sup>1</sup> Besides, Christianity is not the only religion that possesses this trait of inwardness. Both Brahmanism and Buddhism are essentially inward in their emphasis.

No, we must delve deeper into the teaching of Jesus if we are to fathom its unique depths. Can we find there distinctive meanings which will mark off the Christian life of the spirit from other kinds of spiritual life? Can we discern in his teaching thoughts that may be described as characteristically Christian? In short, is there a peculiarly Christian inwardness, and if so, what is it? To find what we seek we must answer the questions, “What does Jesus teach regarding God?” and, “What does he teach concerning man?” We may link to one or the other of these two queries all others that might conceivably be asked, such as those concern-

<sup>1</sup> Mark 7:20-23; vss. 21-23 seem to be an expansion by the evangelist of the thought of Jesus in vs. 20.

ing sin, forgiveness, faith, salvation, the future life.

### WHAT DOES JESUS TEACH REGARDING GOD?

Let us first examine, therefore, the doctrine of Jesus concerning God. Most non-Christians, and many Christians, think of God as a God of power essentially. He is omniscient. He knows everything. He is omnipotent. He can do anything. It is well known how large this element looms in the Moslem conception of God. The recognition of fate and the inculcation of blind submission express this emphasis of Islam. The inscrutability of the all-powerful purposes of Allah and the uselessness of resisting them are cardinal Mohammedan doctrines.

In a similar way, the rabbis of late Judaism magnified the element of aloofness in God's nature. In the thought of the Jews, from the time of the Babylonian exile, the

gap between Jehovah and his people tended to increase. The sense of sin and of its curse brought with it a sense of moral separation. The growing belief in intermediary beings emphasized this separation quite as much as it did the connection between God and man. The whole relationship was usually conceived of in despotic terms which linked the aloofness of Jehovah with the essential thought of power. The Jews did not dare to use Jehovah's real name, "Jahwé." It was too sacred. They employed circumlocutions, or combined the consonants of that name with the vowels of another and less sacred name, "Adonai," thus creating the familiar but linguistically unjustifiable word, "Jehovah."

### THE POWER OF GOD

Jesus, on the other hand, emphasized other phases of the nature of God more strongly than that of power. Still we must not forget that the God of Jesus is clearly a pow-

erful God. In the famous colloquy with his disciples regarding the future chances of rich men, Jesus asserts, "With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible."<sup>1</sup> The relative dreadfulness of falling into the hands of angry men or of an offended God is described in these undoubtedly genuine words: "And I say unto you, my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, who after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him."<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere, simple trust is commended in the words of a nature lover, "Consider the lilies, how they grow: they toil not, neither do they spin; yet I say unto you, Even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God doth so clothe the grass in the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the

<sup>1</sup> Matt. 19: 23-26.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 12: 4-5.



oven; how much more shall He clothe you, O ye of little faith?"<sup>1</sup>

That everything is in God's hands, Jesus everywhere assumes and occasionally asserts. But there is nothing speculative about his assertions. Many of our theological garments have been woven with omnipotence as the warp and omniscience the woof. This may do for sackcloth but not for work-a-day clothes. Jesus cut his cloth from another pattern. God is powerful—all-powerful, in fact—but his power is a practical and not a speculative matter. Like the Sabbath, "it was made for man and not man for it."

### THE LOVE OF GOD

But Jesus' emphasis is not on power at all, but on the love of God. The special term he used for God, the name "Father," which has ever since been considered distinctively Christian, symbolizes beautifully both

<sup>1</sup> Luke 12: 22-30; Matt. 6: 25-34.

the inclusiveness of Jesus' conception and its special interest. The name was not a new one. It appears several times in the Old Testament and was not unfamiliar to the rabbis; but with Jesus it seems to have taken on a new connotation. But even his meaning was not absolutely new. Hosea, Jeremiah and Second Isaiah, among others, had stressed the loving phase of Jehovah's nature. Still, the depth and range of God's gracious love are so much greater in the Gospels that they stamp the whole conception as something new. New it still is, in large part. After two thousand years of training, even Christian theory still finds it hard to survive at the altitude of the Sermon on the Mount, and Christian practice lags far behind its theory. "Ye have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, Resist not him that is evil: but whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. . . . Whosoever shall compel thee to go one mile,

go with him two. . . . Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy: but I say unto you, Love your enemies, . . . . that ye may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.”<sup>1</sup>

Love, in the specially Christian sense, in the sense determined by God's own nature, is graciousness, kindness and helpfulness to those who cannot or will not requite it. Grasp this and you are ready to understand the heart of the gospel of Jesus. The gist of the parable of the Prodigal Son is in the very phase of the story which causes many to sympathize with the elder brother. The whole point is the very lack of desert in the Prodigal, his previous selfishness and ingratitude and his present inability to offer his father anything but a contrite heart. “And he arose and came to his father . . . . his father saw him, and was moved with compassion. . . . And the son said, Father, I have sinned . . . . I am no more worthy

<sup>1</sup> Matt. 5: 38-48.

to be called thy son. . . . But the father said, . . . let us . . . make merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.”<sup>1</sup>

The ethical difficulties in the parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard are solved in the same way. The parable is introduced with the words, “For the Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a man that was a householder.” The householder is the central figure of the story and, in him, one characteristic is featured, namely, the desire to help others needlessly. The parable does not show perfect literary execution, but it is not lacking in clarity. It teaches the free, boundless, uncalculating graciousness of the Father.<sup>2</sup>

The unapproachably beautiful parable of the Good Samaritan leads in the same direction by a different path. The virtue of the Samaritan consisted in his rising above the ordinary separations of life by means of a

<sup>1</sup> Luke 15: 11-32.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 20: 1-16.

broad, human sympathy. The prologue of the parable connects this sort of neighborly love with a right relation to God and consequently presupposes the existence of the same quality in God himself.<sup>1</sup>

Wherever we touch the teaching of Jesus, we feel this throbbing sympathy, expressed or implied. It is not strange, therefore, that the symbol, "Father," was his favorite name for God, for it expresses most aptly Jesus' supreme interest in the practical relation of God to the world: a relation of good-will, which is the essential content of the "inwardness" of God.

But, can we not go further in analyzing the content of this good-will? No doubt we are learning more about it all the time. The revelation of God's love is not yet complete. It is growing with the consciousness of the race. Each generation adds details to fill out the concept. But Jesus did not leave all this to those who should come after him.

<sup>1</sup> Luke 10: 25-37.

He himself tells us a number of important things.

For instance, we learn that the love which the Father expects from his children, namely, his own loving-kindness, is not a weak and pliant thing. It must not be confused with softness. The Father hates sin. "If thy right eye causeth thee to stumble, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not thy whole body be cast into hell."<sup>1</sup> Though his sympathy is as wide as the horizon and as deep as the ocean, it does not and cannot separate sin from punishment. "And if thy right hand causeth thee to stumble, cut it off and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not thy whole body go into hell."<sup>2</sup> These and other stern passages do not enable us to paint the picture in detail. In fact, we are told not to judge, "that ye be not judged." The court

<sup>1</sup> Matt. 5:29.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 5:30.

dealing with such things is one over which we are not called to preside; but we must hold, if only as a word of admonition, that Jesus' conception of God includes some relation to "the wages of sin."

Further, we learn that God's love is of a sort that demands purity of heart. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."<sup>1</sup> It generates a modest willingness to sink fame and personal glory in glad service of others. "And Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they who are accounted to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it is not so among you: but whosoever would become great among you, shall be your minister; and whosoever would be first among you shall be servant of all. For the Son of Man also came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."<sup>2</sup> It demands a peace-loving dispo-

<sup>1</sup> Matt. 5:8.

<sup>2</sup> Mark 10:42-45.

sition, "Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called sons of God";<sup>1</sup> singleness of purpose, "The lamp of the body is the eye; if therefore thine eye be single thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is the darkness! No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."<sup>2</sup>

The divine love is of a sort that can work only through obedient wills. In fact, it is only through action prompted by obedience to the divine impulse that this God-like structure can be built up. "Every one therefore that heareth these words of mine, and doeth them, shall be likened unto a wise man, who built his house upon the rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and

<sup>1</sup> Matt. 5:9.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 6:22-24.



the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon the rock. And every one that heareth these words of mine and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and smote upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall thereof.”<sup>1</sup> Again, this love includes a whole-souled and eager devotion to righteousness, hungering and thirsting, as it were, for everything good. “Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.”<sup>2</sup> The nature of these demands reveals the nature of the love that makes them, and in these things is the true love from God made manifest.

The patience and persistence of true love is clearly indicated in the words, “Blessed are they that have been persecuted for righteousness’ sake for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall re-

<sup>1</sup> Matt. 7: 24-27.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 5: 6.

proach you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets that were before you.”<sup>1</sup> These qualities Jesus pre-eminently embodied in his own life, alike in his relations with slow-minded disciples and exasperating enemies.

He often insists on the forgiving spirit, also, as part and parcel of a love that shares the divine nature. “Then came Peter and said to him, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? until seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven.”<sup>2</sup> Then follows the condemnation of the “Unmerciful Servant.” Lastly, true love, the love characteristic of the Father, inevitably entails suffering. There is in it something essentially vicarious,

<sup>1</sup> Matt. 5: 10-12.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 18: 21-22; 5: 43-48; 6: 12-15.

something that involves suffering with and for others. "And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders, and the chief priests, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he spake the saying openly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him. But he, turning about, and seeing his disciples, rebuked Peter, and saith, Get thee behind me, Satan; for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men. And he called unto him the multitude with his disciples, and said unto them, If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever would save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's shall save it. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

The Cross is not merely an essential part of the original gospel. It is an essential element in every man's true appropriation of

<sup>1</sup>Mark 8:31-35. In this passage the specific nature of the resurrection prediction is probably due to the evangelist.

the "Good News," because it is essential to the "things of God." When, therefore, we speak of love without including in our conception lines of demarcation—separations, hardness, suffering—we substitute for the true conception a soft, emasculated sentimentality which is quite a different thing. We mind "not the things of God, but the things of men."

The distinctive thing, therefore, about Jesus' emphasis upon love in the character of God is not its separation from other ethical qualities and its exaltation in disregard of them, or at their expense. It is, rather, that all possible virtues are subsumed under this all-controlling principle in which they become fused, by which they are energized, and through which a proper balance may be secured in their exercise. In a sense, the thought of God and of his demands is thus immensely simplified, in that the eye may be focused on one point instead of on many. But this is truly a terrible simplicity. It is

so rich, varied, many-sided and all-embracing, and hence so hard to acquire. These things enable us to understand how two diverse and apparently contradictory sayings of Jesus may both be true, namely, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; . . . for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light"; and, "Enter ye in by the narrow gate: . . . For narrow is the gate and straitened the way, that leadeth unto life."<sup>1</sup>

#### GOD AND NATURE

We must not forget to add a word regarding Jesus' conception of God's relation to the physical universe. Man's conquest of nature has caused many terrors to vanish like a morning cloud, but others have arisen to take their place. Whatever the development of science, man will never entirely conquer nature. On the contrary, nature is bound to conquer man, sooner or later; at death, if not before. A religion that does not meet

<sup>1</sup> Matt. 11:28-30; 7:13-14.

the needs arising from this condition cannot permanently satisfy the heart of man. In this connection, Jesus everywhere builds on the basis already laid down by the Hebrew prophets. His teaching, as usual, is practical and not speculative. He assumes that God is the creator of the universe and clearly teaches that the universe is good because it is God's work. There is no essential gap between this phase of things and the human phase. Both alike are objects of his loving care. "Therefore I say unto you, Be not anxious for your life. . . . Behold the birds of the heaven, that they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; and your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not ye of much more value than they?"<sup>1</sup>

#### THE NEARNESS OF GOD

This leads naturally to another element in Jesus' conception of God, and with this we may conclude. In Jesus' thought, the Fa-

<sup>1</sup>Matt. 6: 26-30.

ther was very near to him. This sense of the nearness of God was one of the characteristics which marked him off from his contemporaries. They prayed publicly and elaborately. He sought silence and solitude in which to meet his Father. "He withdrew himself into the deserts and prayed."<sup>1</sup> In silence and in solitude he cultivated simplicity in prayer. "And when ye pray, ye shall not be as the hypocrites: for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. . . . But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thine inner chamber, and having shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in secret."<sup>2</sup> Why use many words? The Father is there and knoweth your needs before you ask. In simple heart-confession we should lay our needs before God with the sincerity and desire of the Publican, knowing that God is near and will hear the cry of the soul. To Jesus, God was an all-powerful

<sup>1</sup> Luke 5: 16.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 6: 5-15.

and an all-righteous God, but he was especially the all-loving and ever-present one. This is the particular content of Jesus' thought of God and of the symbol "Father" which he has made distinctively Christian.

### WHAT DOES JESUS TEACH CONCERNING MAN?

What does Jesus teach concerning man; his nature, place, and destiny? We have already answered this question, in part, while setting forth Jesus' conception of God. It is important to call attention to the fact that this overlapping in the presentation is due largely to the complete fusion of the ethical and religious elements of life in Jesus' view of things. This fusion is one of the central facts of Christian teaching; a fact which allies it closely with Hebrew prophetism and clearly distinguishes them both, in degree, if not in kind, from all other historic religious viewpoints. In other words, Christianity is



not merely an ethical system. It is, rather, an ethico-religious life.

But we can and we must say much more than has been said about Jesus' teaching concerning man's nature, relations and destiny. The filial nature of man is the natural corollary which Jesus drew from his paternal conception of God. Man is the child of God, the son of the Father. "I say unto you, Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you; that ye may be sons of your Father who is in heaven." "Whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and sister and mother." "Suffer the little children to come unto me; forbid them not: for to such belongeth the Kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child, he shall in no wise enter therein."<sup>1</sup>

In a sense, all men are sons of the Father; that is, potentially. While limiting his activity almost entirely to members of his own

<sup>1</sup> Matt. 5: 43-48; 18: 1-3; Mark 3: 31-35; 10: 13-15.

race, in his teaching Jesus evidently deals with man as man. His sympathy is interracial. The Good Samaritan steps across the high barrier between his people and the Jews and is commended therefor. Jesus recognizes the great faith of the Roman centurion with the striking words, "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."<sup>1</sup> Human life, as such, possesses worth and dignity and is full of boundless possibilities. There is not an absolute difference of kind between the human spirit and the divine; no complete gap or break that needs to be artificially bridged. Jesus accepted the old Hebrew thought expressed in one of the creation stories, "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. And God created man in his own

<sup>1</sup> Matt. 8: 10-12.

image, in the image of God created he him.<sup>1</sup>

In man as man, therefore, resides an infinite capacity God-ward. This gives a basis for endless effort, not only in self-development, but also in behalf of others. This faith in man also is itself a progress-producing conviction, for men will attack the most difficult problems if only they can believe that a solution is possible. Jesus was never tired of helping those about him, even the most despised and degenerate, because he saw in them the possibilities of Christian sonship. This is the basal idea of man which he tried to inculcate by precept and example, "Every one is *worthful*."

This worth is due, however, to the kind of life of which man is capable, even though he may not yet be the possessor of it; namely, the divine life. It is due to the fact that he is a potential child of God, even though actual sonship is yet to be achieved. In a real sense, man as man *is* a child of

<sup>1</sup> Gen. 1: 26-27.

God and in another sense, equally real, he must *become* a child of God. "Verily I say unto you, Except ye turn, and *become* as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." <sup>1</sup> "Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." <sup>2</sup> This must be taken in the light of the context and can only mean, "Ye shall be controlled by the same loving purpose which controls the Father." That is, man *becomes* a son of God by submitting willingly and joyfully to the divine will which is one of uncalculating love. In becoming a child of the Father, he becomes like God in this particular. In other words, the divine element in man is not different from the divine element above man. There is but one principle for both, and what God is in respect to that principle, man may become. This is his manifest destiny.

No conception of human nature could be more exalted, and yet it does not ignore the

<sup>1</sup> Matt. 18:3.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 5:48.

hard facts of life. It transcends them, not by ignoring, but by conquering them. Ignorance, filth, vice and disease often force us to ask whether the ideal of actual divine sonship is at all possible. In many cases it seems like a utopian dream; and yet, history and present-day experience afford us ample testimony to the power of God in bringing men to himself, even out of apparently hopeless conditions. The justification of this faith must be sought in a progressive realization of the ideal among men, in signs that this process is really taking place.

This ideal of divine sonship is realized whenever loving service, of an entirely disinterested sort, goes forth from man to man. Here is the fusion of the ethical and the religious in Jesus' teaching. In the Old Testament, "Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with all thy heart" and "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" appear in different books. In the Gospels, Jesus is

represented as bringing them together.<sup>1</sup> Throughout all his teaching these two truths are inseparable. "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren, even these least, ye did it unto me."<sup>2</sup> Brotherly love is the central and controlling ethical principle. Faithful devotion to the will of God is the religious principle. But each is the converse of the other and its complement. In Jesus' teaching, and in true, complete, Christian living, they are not sundered.

I do not wish to be misunderstood in what I have said about the potential divinity of man, according to Jesus' teaching. Lest I be misunderstood, let me emphasize further the references already made to the dark facts of human life and the necessity of conversion. The merely "potential" child of God must truly be "converted" in order to "become" an "actual" child of God. This is the change from the "natural" man to

<sup>1</sup> Deut. 6:4-5; Lev. 19:18; Luke 10:25-29.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 25:31-46.

the "spiritual" man of which Paul says so much and which, indeed, constitutes the great religious problem for us all. This change is not an easy sliding from stage to stage. Even where least remarked, due to favorable upbringing, it means a right-about-face. Concrete instances tend to renew our faith in the primacy of the so-called "grace of God" in this central religious experience. But it makes a great deal of difference whether this "grace" has potentiality to work with or nothing to work with. In the next chapter we shall see what the difference is.

### THE "KINGDOM OF HEAVEN"

The teaching of Jesus was promulgated by him under the Jewish caption, "The Kingdom of Heaven." "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." "Many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in the Kingdom of

Heaven." "The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a grain of mustard seed . . . . leaven . . . . a treasure hid in a field . . . . a merchant seeking goodly pearls." "She saith unto him, Command that these my two sons may sit, one on thy right hand, and one thy left hand, in thy Kingdom. . . . But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Not so shall it be among you: but whosoever would become great among you shall be your minister. . . ." <sup>1</sup>

It may be that Jesus thought of the future establishment of the Kingdom in a somewhat Jewish way; that is, a Kingdom to be miraculously set up by God himself soon after Jesus' death. Certainly we must beware of modernizing his conception by reading into it social ideas which are current to-day. This is a knotty problem, and perhaps an insoluble one. We do not have to wait for its

<sup>1</sup> Matt. 5:3; 8:11; 13:31-33, 44-47; 20:20-28.



solution, however, for whatever conclusion we reach, all must agree that the Kingdom was to Jesus a spiritual thing, fundamentally. It signified the inner union of man with God and with his fellow-man; a great, congenial family of men at one with God and devoted to the execution of his will.

### SOME OTHER FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

All Jesus' teaching concerning the fundamental issues of religion should be interpreted in the light of the controlling emphases already mentioned. Sin is anything that interferes with true sonship. It is not so much an act as an attitude. Hence, pride and hypocrisy may be worse than sins usually deemed much baser. Righteousness, too, is not a mosaic of correct performances, but a rightly directed personal attitude. Personality is indivisible and so is righteousness; a personal thing which exceeds the "righteousness" of the scribes and Pharisees in that it is inward, real, sincere,

and freed from the thought of self by being itself, essentially, regard for the welfare of others. Forgiveness flows forth from the ever-ready love of God to everyone who sincerely repents. When thus received, it necessarily propagates, in and through the recipient, the forgiving spirit. Repentance is the portal to the Kingdom, as with John the Baptist, and forgiveness the joyous experience of an actual child of God, the fact of being, or of becoming, reconciled with him.

Finally, his conception of salvation and of the judgment is inextricably bound up with the Kingdom idea. If the Jewish emphasis was controlling, then the idea of *future* salvation and judgment must have been Jesus' paramount thought. That the future was included in his teaching on these subjects seems clear to me, but the content of this teaching is not so clear. We may say with perfect assurance, however, that whether present or future, in this world or

in the beyond, or both, salvation and judgment could have had only one qualitative meaning for Jesus. When Zaccheus rises to a nobler plane of motive, Jesus cries, "To-day is salvation come to this house." And elsewhere he says, "He that loses his life shall save it and he that saveth his life shall lose it." Salvation comes by losing oneself in the all-compelling purpose of the Father's Kingdom, and judgment rests on him who treasures his own life for its own sake and is loath to let it go.

### IS JESUS' TEACHING SOCIAL IN ITS EMPHASIS?

The Kingdom concept, as adopted by Jesus, necessarily implies a social reference and emphasis, but it is not social in the current sense of that word. Jesus' teaching was primarily individualistic; but it affords ground for, and imparts a great impetus to, an extended social application.

There has been a vast deal of faulty in-

terpretation of the teaching of Jesus in favor of social conceptions that are wholly modern. Many of these modern conceptions and the practical programs inspired by them engage my whole-hearted sympathy. We know too much now about heredity, environment, the drag of the physical and the tyranny of the mass, not to realize that there is such a thing as "social salvation." The future of Christianity depends upon its recognition of these facts and upon the application of its spirit to these needs and problems. Nevertheless, legitimate deduction from, and necessary application of, the teaching of Jesus are not to be confused with historical interpretation. This interpretation yields the conclusion, already given, that Jesus' teaching was primarily individualistic but affords ground for, and imparts a great impetus to, an extended social application. Recent tendencies among social workers make me think that the original individualism of Christianity needs to be re-

emphasized in certain quarters. On the other hand, there are whole sections of the Christian Church still unaware of the social problem and of the social implicates of Jesus' teaching.

## CONCLUSION

Such was Jesus' teaching and, as we saw at the beginning, such must have been his life; for these sayings have a flavor about them betraying the fact that they have been *lived* out, not *thought* out, merely. Had Jesus been a mere teacher, whose life did not especially exemplify what he taught, we might be justified in maintaining that the essence of Christianity lies in the controlling ideas of his teaching. But it is evident that Jesus lived out what he taught, and that it is the spirit of his actual life, even more than of his sublime teaching, that has given us historical Christianity. Thus the Church has been right in insisting on the Person of Christ as central. Of course we

must change our formulae, for we are now obliged to approach this religious question, and all others, from a standpoint far different from that of our ancestors. But the cardinal thing about Christianity is still the fact that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us," and the cardinal experience awaiting each one of us, if we have not already had it, is to behold "his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."

## CHAPTER IV

### THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST

Christians are agreed on the divinity of Christ far more than the ebb and flow of theological terminology would indicate. If the truth were only realized, or admitted, many conservatives and liberals, who now think the gap between them wide and irreducible, would find themselves standing close together. The trouble is that many of the former insist on having the exaltation of Jesus expressed in their terms alone; otherwise, they deny that the exaltation is real or sufficient. On the other hand, many of the latter refuse to use language strong enough to express their true appreciation of Jesus, for fear they will be understood as subscribing to ideas they no longer hold. They deny themselves biblical phrase-

ology which most aptly and beautifully expresses the fundamental agreement which may still exist between the views of a modern thinker and those of the historic Church regarding Jesus Christ. The effect of this attitude may be unfortunate, but its motive is clear and praiseworthy. These men do not wish to fall into the unsteady arms of compromise, for the compromiser is abroad in the land.

#### THE NEW PHASE OF THE QUESTION

The status of the problem for many men has changed utterly. Science cannot dictate to us what our faith shall be, but it has established a method of procedure which must be followed in all historical investigation. And the problem of the divinity of Christ is, in the first instance, an historical problem. We must ascertain the historical facts by means of scientific, historical processes before we seek to pass judgment on the significance of the facts, else we are dealing with



unknown quantities. Thus the old deductive method is gone forever. That is, we cannot begin with God and deduce therefrom the divinity of Jesus. God is the unknown, or partially unknown quantity that can be determined only by equations of historical fact, and these equations can be satisfied only by means of the historical method. I do not mean to say that we can prove the existence of God by means of the historical method. Far from it. What I maintain is that any vital faith in God springs out of facts; that an educated man should consider the whole realm of historic fact in forming his conception of God; that, finally, such a consideration, to be valid, involves the use of the historical method. The problem may be put in this way: What sort of God, if any, do the facts of life lead us to believe in? Does the historical Jesus stand as *the* gateway, *par excellence*, to belief in such a God? If so, what should be our final estimate of Jesus?

## THE TEACHING OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

The Church has been right in emphasizing the Person of Christ as the central fact of Christianity. In this it has but followed the example of the earliest disciples of Jesus. Perhaps I should use the word "personal-ity," because "person" has acquired a meaning which is beyond my present thought. It was not Jesus the teacher, alone or chiefly, who won disciples. It was Jesus the Person; Jesus the man. He lived a life that compelled a following and those Jews who followed him gave him the highest rank they could, next to God himself, namely, messiahship. To them he was *the* messenger of God, bringing light and life; subordinate to God, but second only to him. This is the messianic viewpoint, and in the Synoptic Gospels it is absolutely dominant.

At some time between this primitive period and the appearance of the Gospel of John, there arose the view of the Person of

Jesus so appealingly set forth in the beautiful stories of the infancy. We need not discuss here whether these narratives of Matthew and Luke arose before or after the time of Paul, nor whether they were placed where they are by the evangelists themselves or by later editors. It satisfies our present purpose to remark that here we have a distinct attempt to account for Jesus' divine origin, this being already believed in on other grounds. We do not have to import myths in order to account for this phenomenon. The Hebrew ancestors of these Jewish Christians had often manifested a tendency to ascribe a supernatural birth to those whom they regarded as their great religious leaders, as in the cases of Isaac and of Samuel. A similar but, naturally, much stronger tendency gave rise, probably, to the accounts of Jesus' birth and infancy. The idea these stories embody is that of "physical filiation." They were creations of "popular devotion, destined to

explain the divine sonship of Christ by his supernatural generation." This important product of popular theology eventually became a cardinal factor in the final shaping of the Christian creeds, in which it was amalgamated with various other elements—primitive Jewish-Christian, Pauline, Johannine and others. That it was not such a factor in the first century is evident from the fact that it is ignored by Paul and the author of the Gospel of John. Indeed, such a theory as that of "physical filiation" is far from compatible with either of these other historic Christian viewpoints, namely, the Pauline and the Johannine.

Paul's Christian experience was of the transcendent type. Its conscious beginning was surrounded by abnormal conditions and the vision of Christ on the road to Damascus was ever the burning center of his religious and theological universe. Further, he cut himself off, in large part, from the details of Jesus' historical career which so determined

the thought of his Jewish-Christian brothers. Hence it was but natural that the heavenly Christ should be the burden of his thought and that correspondingly lofty conceptions should appear in his writings. In his way he gave Jesus the first place. And yet he everywhere subordinates him to God, "even the Father" to whom "he shall deliver up the Kingdom" at "the end."

What Paul did in his way the author of the Fourth Gospel also did, but in a way peculiar to himself. Accustomed to the thought of the Philonic school, he exalted his Lord and Master in the terms that lay at hand. In so doing, he performed a great service for the thinking people of his day. Jesus was to him "the Word made flesh." This was understandable to a Greek and doubtless many were led to a proper estimate of Jesus through this way of describing him. The Philonic definitions of "the Word" are somewhat confusing. Sometimes "the Word" is spoken of as equal with God and

sometimes in terms of subordination to him. It was really a term of mediation for a day when the gap between God and man was felt to be much greater than it is now felt to be or, as we may remark in passing, than Jesus evidently felt it to be. "The Word" was the highest of all divine intermediaries; the first step of God downward toward man. The author of the Fourth Gospel possessed a deep Christian experience together with an Alexandrian education and he could not find a better or more suitable name for his Master than this term of mediation current in the Alexandrian school.

### THE RISE OF THE CREEDS

Two centuries of conflict, conquest and compromise passed over the Christian faith. Out of these things came the great creeds of Christendom. Christianity was enthroned upon the seat of power. No longer could it be said, "Not many wise, not many mighty,

are called." Probably the great moving life of the religion was then, as always, down in the midst of the mass of common humanity, but the shaping of Christian polity and doctrine was no longer a naïve thing. It was in the hands of men skilled in politics. "Practical" men controlled these things and "practical" then meant just what it means now: a full recognition of the force of modifying circumstances. What were these modifying circumstances? They were the customs of the Greco-Roman world, its methods of organization and its modes of thought. It is not pertinent to discuss here the details of the adaptation to environment which Christianity underwent, consciously and unconsciously, in the first three centuries of its history. I do not agree with those who hold that all this represented decay. On the contrary, it was inevitable and it has had its place of value in the progress of mankind. Furthermore, as far as the creeds were concerned, it represented, at least in part, a

sincere attempt to explain to the thinking people of the day how the God of the heavens had actually come into contact with a sorely needy humanity, through Christ. The creeds did for the time what now we see every age must do for itself anew; and, for my part, as against the Arians, I think the truth then lay with the Athanasians.

But we have gone a long way upon the path of knowledge since the fourth century. We know more about the human mind and its subtle workings; more about the Bible and the way in which it was written; and, historically at least, more about Jesus of Nazareth and the circumstances surrounding him and his first disciples. This and other new knowledge has forever buried the Athanasian monuments in the sands of oblivion, removing them from the sight of a modern man who is seeking practical religious realities. Perhaps I should say that this ought to be the situation. As a matter of fact, a wrong conception of dogma has



fastened the Athanasian viewpoint on the Christian Church, as something infallible and unchangeable. Otherwise, we should not have even to refer to it here.

The problem of describing satisfactorily Jesus' relation to God and to the world is to-day, in many respects, an entirely different problem from that confronting the Church Fathers. In fact, much more recent phases of the problem are antiquated. The choice that is usually held out at present, of accepting historic Trinitarianism or of being classed as a Unitarian, is an incorrect way of presenting the issue. This false dilemma is due partly to mere polemic, partly to failure to understand the existing situation, and partly to the laziness or the legalism of minds which cannot get on without convenient categories which save time and effort. The issue to-day is simply between what is Christian and what is non-Christian. The choice lies between espousing the Christian view of life and paying homage to some other view.

And by espousing the Christian view of life I mean making effective in thought and in daily living Jesus' fundamental ideas of God, man, the world, and their interrelations; the ideas which we find controlling in his teaching and in his life. This practical, personal appropriation of the spirit of Jesus is, of course, the main problem for us all, but the mind is justified in seeking the implications involved and in asking further, "What think ye of Christ?" This is not merely a speculative task whose results are purely theoretical. A clear answer has practical value in that it clarifies many moral and religious questions.

### THE INCARNATION AND THE DOCTRINE OF HUMAN NATURE

The belief in the necessity, for salvation, of a complete incarnation of God in human form has been due to a prior belief, namely, that human nature is essentially and entirely corrupt. In early Christian thought, begin-

ning at least as early as Paul, the evident evil in human life was joined with the biblical story of the fall of man. The theory of the complete corruption and perverseness of man was the result. On such a theory it was natural to think of God as bringing salvation to man solely through a miraculous incarnation. Thus arose the necessity, in the minds of the thinkers of that day, for regarding Jesus as the "God-Man," in the historic meaning of that term, namely, "God and man in one Person forever."

That God is continually incarnating himself in human life, a religious man must surely hold; and the one differentiating mark of the Christian believer is that he believes Jesus to have been the supreme incarnation of the God-life in man. As Sabatier says, "The Heavenly Father lives within the Son of Man, and the dogma of the God-Man, interpreted by the piety of each Christian, not by the subtle metaphysics of the doctors and the schools, becomes the central and dis-

tinguishing dogma of Christianity." But one difficulty with the position of historic Trinitarianism is that it fails to recognize the fundamental view of man revealed in the Synoptic Gospels—a view which is supported by modern psychology and by our everyday experience—namely, that human nature is not totally corrupt; that, as Jesus taught, all men are potentially "children of God"; that is, there is in man, by nature, a divine element to build on. Hebrew tradition expresses this same view in Gen. 1: 26–27, where we read, "And God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness' . . . . and God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him." The story of the fall, whatever it may have meant to the ancient Hebrew, did not succeed in effacing from his mind this belief.

What is needed for salvation, then, is such an incarnation of the divine life in human form as to lead men to turn their backs on their lower, animal origin and turn their

faces toward God and his will. Many leaders of mankind have performed this task measurably, but one may easily come to the conviction that Jesus has done it supremely and for all time. If one yields to him the practical lordship of life, salvation will inevitably follow. We may consider this salvation as sudden, when it involves a complete change of attitude, as is often the case—conversion, in the root sense of the word. Or we may regard it as gradual, in that it means the steady and often long-drawn-out attempt to realize the Christian attitude in all the relationships of life. Again, we may regard it as present and this-worldly, in that it brings true satisfaction, joy, and achievement in this life. Finally, we may think of it as a future possession, or state of being after death. Under certain conditions the continuance of life after death would be intolerable. Can we conceive of its being “blessed” apart from a capacity to appreciate and appropriate the divine life revealed

in Jesus? For such a salvation—and who would not concede its sufficiency?—it is not necessary to subscribe to the historic definition of the incarnation which the Church has formulated and insisted upon. If one can say with Paul, “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself,” as a true Christian must be able to say, he is in a position to secure all the religious and ethical benefits which Christianity in any form has ever been able to proffer.

We may cast bulwarks about this position, at this point, by reminding ourselves of Jesus’ own teaching and also of the position of the earliest disciples. To my mind, Jesus clearly taught that he was the Messiah; and, to the first disciples, this was the true and final word by which to describe him. This term did not mean then what later Christian theologians, saturated with philosophic conceptions, considered it to mean. It meant merely that member of the Jewish race who was divinely “anointed” to introduce and

head the " Kingdom of God." Why may we not go back to the Synoptic Gospels and content ourselves with the thought of Jesus as the introducer of the Kingdom of God among men and its divine head? Then, freed from any compelling necessity regarding elaborate metaphysics and abstruse dogma, we may devote our whole energy to the supreme and eternally vital task of being introduced into the Kingdom ourselves in order that we may " minister " to the many others who need the same introduction. Jesus was certainly not careful to insist on his complete infallibility in all departments of knowledge or of life, else he would never have said, " Why callest thou me good? None is good save one, even God "; nor would he have disclaimed knowledge of the exact time of the coming of the Kingdom. The disciples, also, were not careful about such abstract considerations, else they would never have reported these sayings. A position sufficient for the Master himself, and for his first dis-

principles, is surely sufficient for us; and if we go back to it, as we easily can, we shall be relieved of a great incubus and set free for the glorious, compelling, Christian task of making the real Christ-life dominant in the world.

### GOD AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

Another objection to the hitherto prevailing viewpoint is the distinction it seeks to establish between God and the Holy Spirit in the very attempt made to unite them. This is easily understandable when we consider the history of this phase of dogma. In the ancient world, especially in late Jewish thought and in the later developments of Platonism, God was conceived of as standing entirely apart from the world of men and of things, as far as his own direct activity was concerned. He was the only holy one, superior to mundane matters in his awesome majesty; or a principle of truth and goodness that could not be brought into con-



tact with human affairs except through some intermediary. Hence the idea of angels and other intermediary beings, or principles, like the Philonic "Word" which the Fourth Gospel adopts, to bring the God-life down to earth. Hence the separative conception of the Holy Spirit of God acting as a bearer of good from God to man.

There is much truth in all these conceptions. The Christian position as embodied in Jesus' teaching is theistic, certainly. That is, God is not man and man is not God. If there is to be any impartation of the spiritual God to a man potentially but not actually spiritual, it must come through channels that can effectively accomplish the transference of spiritual life. History leads us to believe that such impartation is direct from God to man; the actual Spirit, which is God himself, working directly upon the potential spirit, which is man; but also propagated from man to man by the impelling power of God *in* man. Thus any religious

leader of mankind is an intermediary and Jesus may be considered the supreme intermediary—not only prophet and king, but also priest, if we care for historic terminology.

But a modern thinker, of any idealistic kind whatsoever, finds it hard, if he thinks about the matter at all, to differentiate between God and the Holy Spirit of God. God is not only “a spirit” but *the* Spirit, and where the Spirit of Holiness is, there is God. What is the reason for, or the value of, differentiating them and then bringing them together again by means of a metaphysical formula which none can understand and which has no practical religious value that cannot be secured in another way? Whatever may be said for pluralistic views of the universe in general, nothing can be said for that sort of pluralism which practically says: “Let  $x=y$  and  $y=x$ ; then  $x$  and  $y$  are identical and yet distinct.” This sort of thing may do very well on paper, but

it does not touch real life. As a matter of fact, the general trend of our modern thought is toward the unity of the final reality underlying the world; and in so far as this trend is actual, just so far do these ancient distinctions between God the Father and God the Holy Spirit become difficult to maintain.

Here, again, it is a comfort and a support to return to Jesus' teaching and to the position of the first disciples. In the Gospel of John, to be sure, and in the Pauline epistles, the concept of the Holy Spirit is prominent, but it is far from being the metaphysical concept of later times. In the teaching of Jesus reported in the Synoptic Gospels, that is, up to the time of his death, the idea appears in the accounts of only four separate incidents. In two of these cases the parallel passages raise a possible question regarding the correctness of the record in this particular. The third case is a quotation from Isaiah, and in the fourth, the phrase used is " Spirit

of your Father.” Taking all four instances exactly as they stand, the most satisfactory interpretation is that here we have either the customary Jewish circumlocution to avoid the use of the divine name, or simply the old Hebraic use of the word “spirit.” Certainly nothing could be further from the evident meaning of these passages than a metaphysical distinction between God and his Spirit. Everywhere else, and in numerous connections where we might expect to find the concept of the Holy Spirit introduced, Jesus consistently uses the word “Father” and emphasizes the direct and immediate contact between God and his children.

There are seven other occasions reported in the Synoptic Gospels in which we find the Holy Spirit mentioned. One is a citation from Isaiah and five of the others are manifestly of the Hebraic type already referred to. The seventh is the famous passage in Matt. 28:19, where the risen Jesus is reported as using the threefold formula

“Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” Whatever one’s view of its literary history, this particular verse does not belie the truth of the statement that the Synoptic Gospels are dominated by the messianic conception of Jesus and that the idea of the Holy Spirit is rarely found; also, when found, the idea does not warrant the metaphysical interpretation so often put upon it.

In the teaching of Jesus, and in the Synoptic Gospels generally, God is thought of as the loving Father, so near that there is no need nor room for any intermediary between him and his children. He who *is* Spirit, *the* Spirit, is close at hand—God himself. With the disciples it was really a “duality,” the Father and the Son. As a matter of fact, the Pauline and the Johanne conceptions of the Spirit, mentioned in connection with God the Father and Jesus the Son, are far removed from the fourth-century conception. They are really only practical working definitions, describing in

terms of actual Christian experience the way in which God works in the world. This is also true of the threefold formula of Matt. 28:19, referred to above. Undoubtedly, however, in all these instances the thought is beginning to tend away from the simple, practical significance of the Hebraic and dominant Synoptic emphasis.

#### THE MAIN CAUSE OF PRESENT MIS- UNDERSTANDING

In spite of these strictures, my sympathies are with historic Trinitarianism rather than with Unitarianism. Certainly any sympathetic religious man who is not a bigot would respond to the general attitude taken by such great Unitarian leaders as Channing and Martineau, but, generally speaking, Unitarianism has interested itself too largely in pointing to the negative side of the question. In insisting, in season and out of season, that Jesus was "a mere man" it has failed, along with many of its opponents

also, to recognize the fact that no man is "a mere man," according to genuine Christian teaching. Much less can it be said of such a one as Jesus that he was "a mere man."

This point has already been referred to, but it must be insisted upon because the chief root of present misunderstanding is here. Both extreme conservatives and extreme radicals base their position on the old and mistaken view that human nature is totally different and disconnected from the divine nature. I have pointed out that this view does not accord with ancient Hebrew thought nor with the teaching of Jesus. Neither does it accord with the results of modern psychology. It sprang out of late Jewish and late Platonic developments, through both of which it effected an entrance into Christian thought and became controlling. So long as it persists, so long will men who ought to be together remain separated, because the particular way in which the divinity of Christ is conceived of depends upon

this prior position. If there is an absolute gap between human nature and the divine, then the divinity of Christ will be conceived of as a complete, miraculous incarnation, and the tendency will be to run the whole gamut of external authority, infallibility and miraculous proof. If human nature is recognized as potentially divine, the divinity of Christ will be thought of as such an impartation of divine life, in the realm of the ethical and the religious, as will infallibly draw men to God, if Jesus be truly given the pre-eminence. Thus men's hearts will be turned away from sin and they will be led in the ways of righteousness.

#### CAN WE BELIEVE IN THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST?

Let me gather together, in conclusion, the positive, constructive elements in the position here taken, lest their full force be diminished through the piecemeal statement necessitated by the previous inevitable argu-



ment. Most people inherit their religion with the color of their hair and either do not question it at all or do not, cannot, question fairly. Even those who have been forced to question most, in formulating their religious views, are controlled far more by practical tendencies than by purely intellectual considerations. This is as it should be and as it has ever been. For most of us an intellectual statement is only a buttress for, or a clarification of, a faith already more or less spontaneously appropriated. Still, we may be helped by such a statement because our minds demand it. Religion cannot do without dogma. If a body of religionists should unite on the simple basis of their belief in God, the universal Father, that basis would be a dogmatic basis. What is needed is not the elimination of dogma but its simplification, and also a provision for its continual revivification through the adaptation of its statement to advancing knowledge. Let us, therefore, for entirely practical reasons, put

forth an account of the intellectual process by which a modern man, with full recognition of the results of science and of historical criticism, may defend his faith in the divinity of Jesus.

We have a life to live in the midst of a world that is partly, but only partly, intelligible to us. In order to live that life most effectively it is necessary to have some conviction regarding the why of it all, the whence and the whither of things. The facts of existence give us clues which we may follow up far enough to establish reasonable hypotheses, or faiths, by means which we can govern our action, holding fast the more firmly as experience justifies our faith; discarding or modifying as experience compels us thus to change. One is at liberty, of course, to interpret the universe in terms of the lowest of its elements, provided one is willing to pay the penalty. So, one may fix his faith in atoms, become a materialist, and consider all spiritual forms of life as illusory. It would seem

more reasonable, however, to believe that the ultimate nature of an organism is that revealed by its highest manifestations; that which it is capable of producing at its best. If this is true of plants and animals, may we not reasonably assume it to be true of the universe of things, plants, animals and men? One may easily say that one thinks a stone is as good as a man, but "actions speak louder than words," and therefore we do not have to argue the position that there is an ascending scale of being in the universe from the inanimate, through the merely animate, to the consciousness of man.

Current observation and the study of history both may lead us to the conclusion that, in man, it is not merely intellectual acumen which is significant, but also, still more, what we call character and spiritual appreciation, because the latter, far more than the former, have to do with the direction and employment of man's abilities and with his destiny. Among the various exponents of competing

types of character and spiritual appreciation stands Jesus of Nazareth, not merely as a teacher of what is known as the Christian life, but also as a living exemplar of it. It was never easier than now to come to the conclusion that in Jesus—not in his teaching merely, but in himself, in his Person—we have the highest personal manifestation of spiritual life that the world has yet seen. This conclusion may be reached not only through the direct response the life of Jesus calls forth, but also by considering the age-long and ever-increasing command it has exercised over the hearts of men—a command which, in these latter days even more than at earlier times, is overleaping geographical, political and racial boundaries and is exerting its benign influence on man as man.

What can we say, then, about a universe which has produced this wonderful phenomenon? What must we say? Are not we justified in holding that the essential nature of the organism is best revealed in this, its finest

flower? Are we not compelled to say that such things are not due to chance? If not chance, then what? At this point should we not bend the knee and recognize our God? And must it not be that such a God is essentially of the same spirit and purpose as the life through which we come to a belief in him? In other words, must not our God be like Jesus of Nazareth? He cannot be inferior to him and remain God; nor can we easily imagine a quality of life superior to that of Jesus. Thus the usual form of the problem is reversed. The modern question is not, "Is Jesus like God?" but rather, "Is there a God of the same quality of life as that possessed by Jesus?" God is the *x*, the unknown quantity which we are seeking to determine, and it seems most reasonable to hold that Jesus is the known factor through which we are enabled to solve the problem.

If all this is true, or in general accordance with the truth, then we are ready to use with

intelligence, discrimination, and yet with whole-hearted self-commitment, many of the time-worn terms that have been hallowed by Christian usage. Especially may it be said that the language of the New Testament serves to express fittingly our proper appreciation of, and our attitude toward, Jesus of Nazareth. We may call him Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God, the Revealer, the Savior, Lord, and Master. In his varied functions he will be to us Prophet, Priest, and King. Nothing will be too high or too lofty to express our faith in him, our trustful attitude toward him, or our recognition of his supreme and final place in the drama of life portrayed before our half-blind eyes upon the wondrous stage of God's great universe.

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